World War II Partisan Warfare in Italy

PIER PAOLO BATTISTELLI
& PIERO CROCIANI

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER DENNIS

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Elite . 207

World War II Partisan Warfare in Italy

PIER PAOLO BATTISTELLI & PIERO CROCIANI
ILLUSTRATED BY PETER DENNIS

Series editor Martin Windrow

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 4

September 1943: the Italian surrender, and the German occupation

FROM EARLY RESISTANCE TO PARTISAN WARFARE 8

Passive 'resisters' and active 'partisans' ▪ Regional distribution ▪ Group organization ▪ Political identities

SECURITY & ANTI-PARTISAN FORCES 10

Local military commandants ▪ SS and Police structure ▪ Local recruitment in the Alpenvorland ▪ Wider recruitment ▪ RSI *Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana – Carabinieri – Guardia Giovanile Legionaria* ▪ Police elements – *Polizia Repubblicana* ▪ *Centro Addestramento Reparti Speciale – Cacciatori degli Appennini* ▪ Initial German deployments

PARTISAN WARFARE 16

First phase: September 1943–spring 1944 ▪ Anti-partisan operations, spring 1944: north-western Alps – northern Apennines – more widespread activity

INSURGENCY: SUMMER 1944 24

Expansion and coalescing of groups – SOE missions and support – 'free zones' ▪ Collapse of RSI security forces – creation of 'Black Brigades' and 'Apennine Hunters' ▪ Anti-partisan operations, spring–summer: north-western Alps – central Apennines – northern Apennines – Florence – Liguria, and the *Comando Contro Guerriglia* ▪ The new phase, September 1944: operations by field-army units – destruction of 'free zones' ▪ The north-east ▪ German reorganization, and raising of new units ▪ RSI reorganization

CRISIS: AUTUMN–WINTER 1944 42

Second wave of 'free zones' ▪ The north-east ▪ German 'bandit-fighting weeks': 'Green Week' – 'White Week' ▪ Collapse of partisan morale – success of amnesty

RECOVERY: SPRING 1945 47

Reorganization, resupply, and more controlled recruitment ▪ Final anti-partisan operations – German collapse in northern Italy

SUMMARY: THE PARTISANS 50

Character and leadership ▪ Equipment and communications ▪ Tactics and results ▪ Losses on both sides

SUMMARY: THE GERMAN REACTION 57

Intelligence ▪ Territorial control ▪ Tactics and results

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY 62

INDEX 64

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

INTRODUCTION

SEPTEMBER 1943: THE ITALIAN SURRENDER, AND THE GERMAN OCCUPATION

Following the loss of Sicily to the Allied forces, on 24 July 1943 a meeting of the Fascist party's Grand Council voted the dictator Benito Mussolini out of office, and he was subsequently detained. A new government headed by Gen Pietro Badoglio entered secret negotiations with the Allies, and this announced an unconditional surrender on the evening of 8 September 1943, shortly before the Allied landing on the Italian mainland at Salerno. The German reaction was fast and often ruthless. In less than two weeks the bulk of the Italian armed forces were disarmed, and two-thirds of the country was occupied; only the Italian battle fleet managed to escape this fate by surrendering at Malta, while the islands of Sardinia and Corsica were evacuated by German troops. On 25 September, under orders from the theatre commander GFM Albert Kesselring (the Oberbefehlshaber Süd), Gen Heinrich von Vietinghoff's German Tenth Army (AOK 10 – see Glossary) started a staged withdrawal from Salerno with the aim of eventually reaching the Gustav (aka Bernhard) Line north of Naples. Running roughly from Gaeta on the west coast to Ortona on the Adriatic, this would be Kesselring's initial main line of resistance.

By this time the two German command headquarters in Italy were in competition; GFM Erwin Rommel's Heeresgruppe B (HGr B) was responsible for the country north of Florence, while GFM Kesselring's OB Süd, controlling the southern part of the peninsula, was resisting the Allied forces. Rommel's attempts to persuade Hitler to withdraw forces to northern Italy and engage in mobile warfare proved fruitless, and on 6 November Kesselring was given overall operational command in Italy. He took over on the 21st, with the title of Oberbefehlshaber Südwest/HGr C, having under command AOK 10 in the south and, replacing HGr B in the north, Gen Eberhard von Mackensen's newly formed AOK 14. Following the Allied winter attacks on the Gustav Line at Cassino and Ortona, and the landing behind it at Anzio on the west coast on 23 January 1944, on the 25th of that month AOK 14 would

It was never possible to protect all routes from partisan attacks, and warning signs like this one were displayed by the roadsides in the most threatened areas. It translates roughly as: 'Danger! Bandit area! Keep yourself secure!'. Throughout their areas of conquest the Germans habitually used the term *Bande*, 'gang', for all resistance fighters, so a literal translation would be 'gangster' – thus denying their partisan enemies any kind of legitimacy. (Crociani)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Italian infantrymen in Rome surrender to paratroopers of 2. Fallschirmjäger Div after the ceasefire of 10 September 1943, with their weapons and equipment stacked in the background. The Germans were unable to disarm and take control of all Italian troops, and thousands of stragglers took to the hills. (Cappellano)

be deployed at the front and replaced in northern Italy by the provisional AGr von Zangen, formed from LXXXVII Armee Korps.

The form of the Germans' occupation of Italy from Rome up to the northern frontiers was partly influenced by their rescue of Mussolini from custody on 12 September 1943. Two days earlier, Hitler had ordered that the easternmost border areas be placed under German civilian administration (in fact, semi-annexed) to form the 'operation zones' of the Pre-Alps (Operationszone Alpenvorland, OZAV) and the Adriatic Coast (Operationszone Adriatisches Küstenland, OZAK). The rest of what became known as '*Duce* Italy' was put under a German military administration led by Gen Rudolf Toussaint, appointed Bevollmächtigter General der deutschen Wehrmacht in Italien ('Plenipotentiary General of German Armed Forces in Italy'), though subordinated to Kesselring in operational matters. Also

On 19 September 1943, in response to the abduction of two German soldiers at the village of Boves in the western Alps near Cuneo, III/SS-Pz Gren Rgt 2 from 1. SS-Pz Div 'Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler' carried out reprisals. Under the orders of SS-Stubaf Jochen Peiper (seen here looking through binoculars), many houses were burned down when the village was shelled by 15cm 'Grille' self-propelled guns. (ANPI)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

subordinate to Kesselring was the SS and Police organization in Italy, led by SS-Obergruppenführer Karl Wolff, who was appointed on 23 September 1943 as 'adviser' for police matters to the Italian government, and Höchster SS- und Polizei Führer Italien (HSSPF).

The actual creation of the Repubblica Sociale Italiana (RSI) announced by Mussolini on 18 September took some time, and its military and security units only began to be formed in November, in what was an already complex situation. As C-in-C Italy Kesselring was responsible for all military matters, and to fight the Allies most German field units were deployed either at the front or along the coasts. General Toussaint was subordinated to Kesselring in related matters such as security, but the former's lack of troops necessitated that either the Italians or the SS and Police pick up some of the burden, further complicating the chain of command.

Glossary of acronyms & abbreviations used in this text		
AA/AGr	Armee Abteilung/Armee Gruppe	(German) Corps command provisionally raised to army status/ army group
AK	Armee Korps/ Aussenkommando	(German) Army Corps/ (SS organization) detached commands
AOK	Armee Oberkommando	(German) Army HQ
BdO	Befehlshaber der Ordnungspolizei	(German) Commander of Barracks Police
BdS	Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und Sicherheitsdienst	(German) Commander of Security Police & Security Service
Bev Gen	Bevollmächtigter General	(German) territorial general commanding
BLO		British Liaison Officer
BN, BN mob	Brigata Nera, Brigata Nera Mobile	(Italian) Black Brigade, Mobile Black Bde
Bo	Bodenständig	(German) static unit
Btl/Btg	Bataillon/battaglione	(German/Italian) battalion (M prefix = elite Blackshirts unit)
CARS	Centro Addestramento Reparti Speciali	(Italian) Special Units Training Centre
CLN/CLNAI	Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale/ Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale Alta Italia	(Italian) National Liberation Committee/CLN Northern Italy
CoGu	Contro Guerriglia	(Italian) Anti-partisan command & units
Div	Divisione/Division	(Italian/German) division
Feld Gend Abt	Feldgendarmerie Abteilung	(German) Military field police battalion
Fest Brig	Festungs Brigade	(German) Fortress brigade
FJR	Fallschirmjäger Regiment	(German) Parachute regiment
Frw	Freiwillig/e	(German) voluntary/volunteer
Fsch Jäg Div	Fallschirmjäger Division	(German) Paratroop division
Fsch Pion Btl	Fallschirm Pionier Bataillon	(German) Paratroop engineer battalion
GAP	Gruppi di Azione Patriottica	(Italian) Patriotic Action Groups – urban partisans
Geb/Geb Jäg/Geb Div/ Geb Schule, etc	Gebirgs/Gebirgs Jäger/Gebirgs Division/Gebirgs Schule, etc	(German) Mountain/ mountain troops/ mountain division/ mountain school, etc
Gend Kdo, Gend Eins Kdo	Gendarmerie Kommando, Gendarmerie Einsatz Kommando	(German) Battalion-level units of Gendarmerie (militarized rural police)
Georg	Georgisch	(German) Georgian – prefix of unit title
GFM	Generalfeldmarschall	(German) Field Marshal
GFP	Geheime Feldpolizei	(German) Secret Field Police
GL	'Giustizia e Libertà'	(Italian) 'Justice and Freedom' partisan groups

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

GNR	Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana	(Italian) National Republican Guard
Gp	Gruppo	(Italian) battalion-size unit
GR	Grenadier Regiment	(German) Infantry regiment
Gren Brig	Grenadier Brigade	(German) Infantry brigade
HGr	Heeresgruppe	(German) Army group
HSSPF	Höchster/Höhere SS- und Polizei Führer	(German) Supreme/ High SS & Police Commander
ID	Infanterie Division	(German) Infantry division
KGr	Kampfgruppe	(German) Battle group – temporary unit
Korück	Kommandant rückwartige Gebiet	(German) Rear area commander, Army
Ital	italienisch/Italiano	(German/Italian) Italian
Leg	Legione	(Italian) Legion – regiment-size unit
Lw Sich Rgt	Luftwaffe Sicherungs Regiment	(German) Air Force Security Regiment
MAS	Motoscafo Anti Sommergibile	(Italian) lit. 'anti-submarine motor boat' – traditional title of Italian Navy special unit
MK	Militärkommandantur	(German) Local military administrative command staff
OB Süd/Südwest	Oberbefehlshaber Süd/Südwest	(German) Commander-in-Chief South/ Southwest – Kesselring's command before/ from November 1943
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht	(German) Armed Forces High Command
OSS		(US) Office of Strategic Services
Ost-Btl	Ost-Bataillon	(German) Eastern 'volunteer' infantry battalion, raised in USSR
OZAK	Operationszone Adriatisches Küstenland	(German) Operations Area Adriatic Coast
OZAV	Operationszone Alpenvorland	(German) Operations Area Pre-Alps
PAI	Polizia dell'Africa Italiana	(Italian) Italian Africa Police
Pol	Polizei	(German) Police
POW		prisoner of war
Pz Abt	Panzer Abteilung	(German) Tank battalion
Pz Aufkl Abt	Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung	(German) Armoured reconnaissance battalion
Pz Gren Div/Rgt	Panzergrenadier Division/Regiment	(German) Motorized infantry division/ regiment
Pz Jäg Abt	Panzerjäger Abteilung	(German) Anti-tank battalion
RAP	Raggruppamento Anti Partigiani	(Italian) Anti-Partisan Command
RAU	Reparto Arditi Ufficiali	(Italian) Special Forces Officer Unit
Rgt	Regiment/reggimento	(German/Italian) regiment
RSI	Repubblica Sociale Italiana	(Italian) Italian Social Republic – Mussolini's state
SAP	Squadra di Azione Patriottica	(Italian) Patriotic Action Squads – urban partisan supporters
SD	Sicherheitsdienst	(German) SS Security Service
Sich Rgt	Sicherungs Regiment	(German) Security regiment
SOE		(British) Special Operations Executive
SS	Schutzstaffel	SS – political police, or military Waffen-SS units
SSPF	SS- und Polizei Führer	(German) local SS & Police Commander
TSD/CST	Trientiner Sicherungs Dienst/ Corpo Sicurezza Trentino	(German/Italian) Trento Region Security Service/ Corps
Turk	Turkestanisch	(German) Turkoman – prefix of unit title
Waffen		prefix of non-Germanic Waffen-SS volunteer unit titles & ranks
zbV	zur besonderen Verwendung	(German) 'for special purposes'

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

FROM EARLY RESISTANCE TO PARTISAN WARFARE

Armed forces personnel, mostly from the Army, were the first to form resistance and partisan groups, initially and primarily to avoid capture and deportation to Germany as prisoners of war. When their prison camps were abandoned by the Italians considerable numbers of POWs, mostly from Yugoslavia but also Allied, joined up with or formed partisan groups. Civilians began to follow suit, usually being drawn from the anti-Fascist political parties that had resurfaced after Mussolini's downfall in July 1943.

Initially there was a marked difference between 'resisters' and 'partisans'. In the former case, large groups did not attempt partisan activity but simply sought safe areas away from the Germans. The largest of these were formed in the area of Boves in north-west Italy, and on the southern Adriatic coast near Ascoli Piceno and Teramo. Partisan groups actively seeking to practice guerrilla warfare were also formed by both Italian military personnel and civilians, but these were initially quite small, usually comprising no more than 10–12 men and rarely exceeding 50 in number. On the west coast, an uprising in Naples on 27 September following harsh measures taken by the retreating Germans ended on 1 October when the Wehrmacht evacuated the city. Partisan groups that had formed in the rugged hills surrounding Rome were compelled to withdraw following the Allied landing at Anzio on 22 January 1944; subsequently, groups were mainly active in the areas south of Viterbo, at Terni-Rieti and in the mountains between Rome and L'Aquila (see Map A).

Generally, and for obvious reasons, the early partisan bands were created in mountainous areas: spreading along the northern Italian border in the western Alps, following the mountains running south from behind the Ligurian coast, in the northern Apennines down to the Arno river, and thus to the central Apennines. In the western Alps the destruction of the early resistance group at Boves (Cuneo) on 19 September 1943 marked the beginning of a new phase of German reprisals against civilians. Subsequently partisan groups were formed in the western Alps near Cuneo, in the valleys west of Turin and Pinerolo, and between Turin and Biella. North of Milan, in the northern Alps, groups formed near Lakes Maggiore and Como, others north of Varese, Lecco, Bergamo, and Brescia. There was something of a gap to the east, with groups forming only north of the city of Vicenza to the south of the Dolomite Mountains, and spreading to the east mostly in the areas of Belluno, Udine, and Gorizia (where the Yugoslav IX Korpus was active).

Partisan groups in the areas inland of Imperia, Savona, Genoa and La Spezia linked to the south with those around Pavia and Piacenza, where the Apennines bend to the south-east. Early groups were formed in the area north of Florence, at Pistoia, Lucca and Apuania, linking to the north with those formed south of the line Parma–Reggio Emilia–Modena. Other groups were

Four partisans from an unidentified group, posing for the camera wearing summer clothing and proudly displaying their weapons, including two Breda 30 light machine guns (left). At first the groups were not always strictly identified with one of the different anti-Fascist political parties, but such divisions grew more rigid as time passed.
Groups formed close to the military front line in the south did not last for long. On the southern Adriatic coast they sprang up initially in the areas of Sulmona, at Chieti, and between L'Aquila and Teramo (see Map A, bottom right). At Bosco Martese (Teramo), as early as 25 September 1943, the Ammazzalorso band (one of the three largest) was broken up by a German operation, and on 17 October a group in the Ascoli Piceno area suffered the same fate. That month AOK 10 ordered the evacuation of civilians from areas in the rear of the Gustav Line. Although this was hardly accomplished, a series of security sweeps and reprisals eventually compelled local partisans either to cross the front line to join the Allies, or to flee to the north or west into the mountains. (ANPI)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

formed further south in the areas of Florence, Siena and Arezzo, and south of the line Bologna–Forlì–Cesena. Smaller groups formed to the west near Grosseto, and to the east in the area Ascoli Piceno–Macerata–Foligno.

Estimates put the number of armed partisans in September–October 1943 at some 1,500, two-thirds of them in northern Italy; but numbers were subsequently swollen by draft-dodgers escaping the military conscription begun in mid-November by the RSI, and by December 1943 the total was estimated at 9,000–10,000. The early winter also saw partisan groups starting to organize their structure. In general, civilian groups related to the local organization of the Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale (CLN). By November 1943 the CLN started to organize partisan 'brigades' by linking together diverse smaller bands that now responded to a unified command at local level. The basic structure saw two groups each of 5–6 men forming a 'squad'; four to five squads formed a 'detachment' of 50–60; and two to five detachments formed a 'brigade', with a strength ranging from 100 to 300 men. Brigades were usually related to political parties, but were sometimes of mixed composition. The Garibaldi brigades were formed by the Communists, the Giustizia e Libertà (GL) brigades by the Action party, the Matteotti brigades by Socialists, the Mazzini brigades by Republicans, and the Fiamme Verdi ('Green Flames') brigades by Catholics. Several independent, non-party formations also continued to exist.

A partisan squad probably photographed in the central Apennines in spring 1944. They are mostly dressed in civilian clothing, but their collection of weapons includes captured German 7.92mm Kar 98 rifles and stick-grenades, Italian 6.5mm Carcano carbines, and even a British 9mm Sten sub-machine gun. Although the first Allied airdrop of weapons to partisans had taken place as early as 27 November 1943, it was May 1944 before large-scale deliveries could begin. (Vitetti)

Lack of a centralized command naturally led to differences of opinions and tactics. The national CLN in Rome had links with some groups in northern Italy, but only on 31 January 1944 was a sort of central structure formed by entrusting a leadership role to the CLN in Milan, now called CLN Alta Italia (CLNAI). Nevertheless, different policies persisted; the GL brigades aimed to form a 'national army', while the Communists pursued guerrilla warfare, which they carried out in the cities by forming Gruppi di Azione Patriottica (PAG, 'Patriotic Action Groups') in parallel with their Garibaldi brigades in the countryside.

By April 1944 partisan strength in German-occupied Italy had grown to an estimated 13,500, of whom 48 per cent were Communists but also including significant independent and GL formations (28 and 21 per cent, respectively). The largest groups were in the north-western Alps (some 3,500), with about another 1,500 each in the adjoining areas around Milan and Genoa. Some 2,000 were in the north-east, about 3,000 in the northern Apennines, and another 2,000 in the central Apennines. Figures varied greatly over short periods, however. For example, the 'Morbiducci' Garibaldi Bde in Val Varaita swelled from an initial 30 members in January 1944 to no fewer than 3,000 that February, only to shrink again to some 600 in March.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

A rare photo, taken before the Italian surrender, including (second right) SS-Sturmbannführer Herbert Kappler, SD commander in Rome in 1943–44; note the SD's plain black right collar patch, and the Nazi Party 'Old Fighter's' chevron on his right sleeve. Kappler is shown here with two generals of the Italian Africa Police: (left), Gen Presti, commander of Italian police forces in Rome after the September surrender; and (second left) Gen Marraffa, who would be arrested by the Germans and would die in Dachau concentration camp. The German Police officer (right) wears low on his left breast the runes badge showing his individual membership of the SS. (Crociani)

SECURITY & ANTI-PARTISAN FORCES

Regional military commandants

After the redeployment of the bulk of German forces and the creation of an administrative structure in occupied Italy in autumn 1943, Gen Toussaint's remit for maintaining security was soon challenged by the parallel SS organization led by SS-Ogruf Wolff. In fact, the German administrative structure based on a series of Militärkommandanturen (MKs, mostly stationed in the main cities of northern Italy) was ill-suited to the security task. Each MK had only 20-odd Feldgendarme for protection; it was not until April 1944 that each MK was authorized to raise an Italian Wach Kompanie ('guard company'), followed on 31 May by the order to form two Italian Sicherungs Kompanien ('security companies'). The only operational units under Toussaint's direct command were Feld Gend Abt 541, and three Ost-Btl of 'volunteers' from the Soviet Union, plus the HQ (Stab) of Sich Rgt 38 to command them. Also under Army command was the 5,300-strong Slovakian Technical Bde deployed since November 1943 in the Po delta close to the Adriatic coast, but, like the 11 Czech battalions (totalling 4,700 men) deployed from May 1944 in the north-west and Po areas, this was very unreliable and soon plagued by desertions.

SS and Police structure

The SS and Police structure in Italy would soon become the foremost anti-partisan organization. SS-Ogruf Wolff's role as HSSPF was to supervise and coordinate the activities of the two commands directly subordinate to Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler: that of the Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und SD (BdS, in the person of SS-Gruf Wilhelm Harster), and of the Befehlshaber der Ordnungspolizei (BdO – SS-Gruf & GenLt der Pol Jürgen von Kamptz). In September 1943 the only local commanders answering to these were the SS- und Polizei Führer (SSPF) Alpenvorland, SS-

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Brigaf Karl Brunner, and the Höhere SS- und Polizei Führer (HSSPF) Adriatisches Küstenland, SS-Ogruf Odilo Globocnik.

The BdS controlled the 'political' police that were mainly active in the cities, namely the Gestapo and the Sicherheitsdienst (SD); as the SS 'intelligence' service the SD always had a certain degree of independence, and answered to Berlin in any matter apart from local anti-partisan activity. The BdS's security HQ at Verona was only some 250 strong; initially it had eight local commands (Aussenkommando) in Rome, Perugia, Florence, Venice, Bologna, and – under the Gruppe Oberitalien-West led by SS-Ostubaf Walter Rauff – in Milan, Turin and Genoa. The main security and anti-partisan 'muscle' was provided by the BdO's uniformed police from either the Ordnungspolizei or the Gendarmerie.[1] In September–October 1943, five Security Police battalions had already been deployed (three of SS-Pol Rgt 15, III/SS-Pol Rgt 12, & I/SS-Pol Rgt 20), followed in November–December by three of Gendarmerie. On 23 January 1944 the first local commander, SSPF Oberitalien-West (SS-Brigaf Willy Tensfeld), was appointed to control the north-western regions of Piedmont, Lombardy and Liguria, with the initial support of a 'special purpose' SSPF zbV led by SS-Gruf von Kamptz.

This photo probably shows men from SS-Pol Rgt 'Bozen', which was raised late in 1943 among the ethnic German population in the Alpenvorland. Seen here on operations east of Belluno in north-east Italy in September 1944, they wear camouflage shelter-halves over German uniforms, and helmets (at least one of which sports the Police eagle decal), but have Italian ammunition pouches. Note the absence of the Police eagle badge from the left sleeve of the man in the foreground. (ANPI)

Local recruitment in the *Alpenvorland*

The shortage of security forces prompted the Germans to raise units locally from among some 200,000 ethnic Germans in the Bolzano region (which, like most of the Alpenvorland, had been annexed by Italy only at the end of World War I). On 13 September 1943, immediately after the Italian surrender, GFM Rommel's command formed in that province the volunteer Südtiroler Ordnungs Dienst (SOD, 'South Tyrol Order Service'), but in November the Trientiner Sicherungs Verband (TSV, 'Trento Security Unit') was also formed in the Italian-ethnic Trento region. Based on a 'Defregger' rotation system alternating periods of training, employment and leave, the SOD was intended to reach a strength of some 18,000; by December 1943 it was actually less than 8,000 strong, with fewer than 2,000 on permanent duty (the TSV contributed a further 1,000 men). In September 1943 SS-Ogruf Wolff had already obtained control of the SOD and TSV, and followed this on 1 October 1943 by creating the Pol Rgt 'Südtirol', soon renamed Pol Rgt 'Bozen'. With three, later four battalions, on 7 June 1944 the Pol Rgt 'Bozen' would provide men (along with others from the SOD) to form the Pol Rgt 'Alpenvorland' of three battalions plus an Ersatz Btl replacement unit. By then conscription had already replaced voluntary recruitment in the Operationszone Alpenvorland.

Wider recruitment

As early as August 1943 Himmler had planned to use large numbers of

1 The former were the regiments and battalions of 'barrack' police, the latter the rural police. See MAA 434, *World War II German Police Units*, and WAR 61, *German Security and Police Soldier 1939–45*.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Italian volunteers, mostly from the Blackshirts units; 20 militia battalions with a total strength of 15,000 were envisaged. In the event, however, October saw only some 13,000 volunteers (mostly from Yugoslavia) gathered at the Münsingen training camp, and this figure soon dropped to about 10,000. Orders were issued in October and December 1943, eventually enforced on 10 January 1944, to create six italienische Polizei Freiwillige Bataillone ('Italian Police Volunteer Battalions'). In December 1943 about 6,600 men were sent to Mestre, near Venice, and by January 1944 some 9,100 men formed 11 battalions (plus two Ersatz Btl) of what was then called the Waffen-Miliz ('Armed Militia'). On 9 February, SS-Ogruf Wolff ordered the creation of 1. Sturmbrigade der ital Freiwillige Legion ('1st Assault Bde of the Italian Volunteer Legion'). This Waffen-SS unit seems to have had its pick of the volunteers, and in April 1944 only four Pol Frw Btl (plus two Ersatz) existed, with a total strength of about 3,700.

RSI *Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana*

Reorganization of the Italian armed forces started only in October–November 1943, and most units were intended to support the Wehrmacht in the field. Only the RSI's Esercito Nazionale Repubblicano (ENR, 'National Republican Army') could provide a basic territorial structure with a command in every major city, but the core of Italian security and police forces was to be the

A

MAP A: PARTISAN WARFARE, SPRING 1944

Sketch map (with modern national borders) of northern and central Italy in April–May 1944, showing cities; towns mentioned in the text; and important main roads (brown lines). To avoid overcrowding, railway lines are not shown; the major routes more or less – and sometimes, closely – followed the main roads.

Red spots show the approximate locations of the main partisan groups at this period.

Ringed numbers Again, to avoid a confusing overcrowding of the map, we have had to omit marking the areas of individual German and RSI security units. However, the ringed numbers indicate main anti-partisan operations, and these may be cross-referenced from the body text, where the major participating units are mentioned. For example: **ringed number 30** at bottom right refers to text reference [A-30] – Map A, number 30 – on text page 24. This was Operation 'Osterei' between Viterbo and Rieti on 12–13 April 1944, conducted by Oberst Ludwig Schanze's Stab für Bandenbekämpfung ('Staff for Anti-Bandit Warfare') commanding II/3 Brandenburg Rgt, and I/SS-Pol Rgt 20 based north-east of Terni. Similarly, at top left, **ringed number 42** refers to text reference [A-42]. This is identified on page 29 as Operation 'Hamburg', carried out north of Biella on 28 May–3 June by a 3,150-strong force assembled by SS-Brigaf Willy Tensfeld, the SSPF Oberitalien-West. They included I & II/SS-Pol Rgt 15 (based south of Turin and south of Milan, respectively), and an element from III/SS-Pol Rgt 12 (based north of Milan), with support from Italian GNR units.

General areas of deployment

Armies: The front lines of the German Tenth and Fourteenth Armies are both off the bottom of the map. The rear areas of AOK 10, which was fighting on the Gustav Line, included the regions of Abruzzo (province of Teramo), and part of Marche (Macerata and Ascoli Piceno), at the bottom right. Those of AOK 14, which was deployed facing Anzio, included Umbria (provinces of Terni and Perugia), Lazio (Viterbo and Rieti), and part of Tuscany (Grosseto), at bottom left. Armeegruppe von Zangen was deployed widely further north, to protect both the Tyrrhenian and Adriatic coasts from possible Allied landings.

SS commands: The SSPFs' areas of competence partly overlapped those of the army commands.

SSPF Oberitalien-West included Piedmont (provinces of Alessandria, Aosta, Asti, Cuneo, Novara, Turin and Vercelli); Liguria (Genoa, Imperia, La Spezia and Savona); and Lombardy (Bergamo, Brescia, Cremona, Como, Mantova, Milan, Pavia and Varese).

SSPF Oberitalien-Mitte's area included Veneto (Padua, Rovigo, Treviso, Venice, Verona and Vicenza), and Emilia Romagna (Bologna, Ferrara, Forlì, Modena, Parma, Piacenza, Ravenna and Reggio Emilia).

SSPF Mittelitalien's area included Tuscany (Apuania, Arezzo, Florence, Livorno, Lucca, Pisa, Pistoia and Siena); Marche (Ancona, Ascoli Piceno, Macerata and Pesaro); and Umbria.

The 'operations zones' were separate commands. Operationszone Alpenvorland (OZAV – provinces of Bolzano, Belluno and Trento) and Operationszone Adriatisches Küstenland (OZAK – Gorizia, Pola, Trieste and Udine), at top centre and top right, were the responsibility of the SSPF Alpenvorland and HSSPF Adriatische Küstenland respectively.

Each provincial or regional capital city had an Italian Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana (GNR) and an Esercito Nazionale Repubblicano (ENR, 'National Republican Army') command, and most of them also had a German Militärkommandantur (MK) or administrative military command.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

A group from a local GNR command prepare to move out on an anti-partisan operation; their truck displays the National Republican Guard's 'double-M' symbol above 'G.N.R.' The men wear a mixture of khaki and grey-green clothing including black Fascist and grey-green Army caps and shirts, and have a Breda 30 LMG on top of the cab for close protection. Guardsmen were usually carried in trucks to the immediate vicinity of an operation area. (Molinari)

newly created Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana (GNR). Officially formed on 18 December 1943 under Renato Ricci, the GNR was planned to merge the Blackshirts of the Fascist party's MVSN militia,[2] the Carabinieri military police, and the Rome-based cadre of the Italian Africa Police (PAI).

On paper this could have been a formidable organization, some 125,000 strong in January 1944, but the reality was quite different. Up to 47,500 of them came from the Carabinieri, who served both as a military police and a national gendarmerie, and who therefore had stations in every corner of the country. With their background of loyalty to the crown, the Carabinieri were a necessary but politically unreliable force; the plan was to merge their organization with that of the Blackshirt MVSN, and replace a large number of their officers and NCOs with more reliable Blackshirts. But the 40,000-odd Blackshirts were mostly over-age and ineffective, while 16,000–17,000 'special militias' (for the protection of communications), and 8,000 men serving in the anti-aircraft artillery (soon to be transferred to the Air Force), could not in fact be spared for other duties. With only some 1,000 Blackshirts in the GNR's operational units, much depended upon Ricci's plans to recruit young volunteers for a Guardia Giovanile Legionaria (GGR, 'Youth Legionary Guard'). In parallel Ricci tried to create combat units from the GGR, which by 1 March 1944 had four officers' training schools and associated battalions.

This ambitious reorganization was greatly hampered by disagreements with SS-Ogruf Wolff, to whom the operational organization and anti-partisan deployment of the GNR had been subordinated on 1 October 1943, and by the opposition of GFM Kesselring. The structure of the GNR only emerged in May 1944: 58 HQs in major cities, controlling five Ordine Pubblico ('Public Order') battalions and 53 separate companies, plus six territorial battalions, in addition to the 'special militias' mentioned above. However, fewer than 4,000 Blackshirts had joined up at their local Carabinieri stations, so the 45,000 Carabinieri (in March 1944) still provided the only national security force in place. By 20 June 1944 the GGR schools and battalions listed more than 9,000 personnel following the recruitment of at least 17,000 young volunteers, some of whom were used to replenish the GNR's operational units, by then 6,200 strong.

Italian police

Given the lack of resources available to the BdS, Italian police, including political police, also played a significant role, although their reorganization was not without problems. The situation in Rome, foremost in German

2 The *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale*, from which the Blackshirt military units were drawn. See WAR 144, *Italian Blackshirt 1935–45*.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

concerns, became serious after the last two Italian Army battalions there were disarmed on 23 September 1943, followed by the Carabinieri on 7 October (some 4,000 out of 6,500 fled). That left 8,600 police and 2,100 frontier guards (Guardia di Finanza), both forces being considered unreliable, and only some 1,700 of the Italian Africa Police in the city after it was declared 'open' and field units were withdrawn. The only German units were an Army territorial battalion, four Ordnungspolizei companies forming the Pol Gruppe Rom, and III/Pol Rgt 'Bozen'.

This made the various 'private' police elements, formed rather chaotically by groups of Fascists soon after the German occupation, a useful addition. The 'bands' Koch and Carità, named after their leaders, were active in Rome and Florence respectively as political police under BdS control. In Milan on 18 March 1944 the Legione Autonoma Mobile 'Ettore Muti' ('Independent Mobile Legion "Ettore Muti"') was formed with two battalions; once formally incorporated into the Italian police, the Legione 'Muti' operated in Milan city and its environs under BdO control.

Men from the Legione Autonoma Mobile 'Ettore Muti' in Milan, summer 1944. The most famous and effective of the many independent quasi-police units formed in the RSI, this was named after a Fascist hero killed shortly after Mussolini was deposed on 25 July 1943. (Vitetti)

On 20 November 1943 the Polizia Repubblicana was established on paper, and began forming in January 1944. Merging together constabulary and local police forces located only in the 66 main cities and towns, in April 1944 it reported a strength of 23,000 men, plus 20,000 'auxiliaries' who were intended to create operational battalions, and 7,000 in training schools.

Given this confusing situation, delays in deploying Italian anti-partisan field units are hardly surprising.

Initial German deployments

The belated creation of Italian security forces naturally influenced the deployment of German assets. In December 1943, Sich Rgt 38 in Turin only had under command Ost-Btl 617 (at Susa), followed in March 1944 by Ost-Btl 263 and Georg II/198 Btl (both at Cuneo), while Feld Gend Abt 541 was stationed at Turin. At first I/SS-Pol Rgt 15 was also in Turin and, from April–May 1944, at Vercelli, being active in the area Turin–Biella with detached companies in Ancona. III/SS-Pol Rgt 15 was in Milan apart from its 11th Co in Rome; in October–November 1943 the latter, together with 5th and 7th Cos from II/SS-Pol Rgt 15 and 3rd Co from I/SS-Pol Rgt 20, formed the Pol Gruppe Rom. I/SS-Pol Rgt 20 operated in the rear area of AOK 10 (carrying out, among others, Operation 'Werner' on 15 February 1944); it was eventually to deploy to the L'Aquila area, while III/Pol Rgt 'Bozen' was sent to Rome in February 1944. The total strength of these units in April 1944 was about 3,400, plus 1,600 in the Gend Kdo Italien-Nord (at Brescia, with three companies); Gend Kdo Italien-Mitte (near Bologna, four companies); and Gend Eins Kdo Bürger, named after SS-Oberf Karl-Heinz Bürger, which was active in the north-west before being transferred in April 1944 to central Italy.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

PARTISAN WARFARE

First phase: September 1943–spring 1944

'Partisan warfare' can be said to have already started during the initial disarmament of Italian troops; on 18 and 24 September 1943, HGr B reported that bands of soldiers, partisans and escaped Allied POWs were engaging German units taking part in that process. On 19 September, III/SS-Pz Gren Rgt 2 of 1. SS-Pz Div 'LSSAH' began the pattern of reprisals all too familiar in other parts of Europe when, during one of the first anti-partisan operations, it burned down several houses in the village of Boves and killed 24 locals [Map A, ringed key number 1]. Between 27 September and 4 October the 'LSSAH' carried out unsuccessful operations in the area Varese–Pinerolo–Biella, before being transferred back to the Eastern Front.

The first operations against early partisan groups were widely scattered and mostly unsuccessful. In September–October an operation by LI Geb AK in the Teramo–Macerata area on the Adriatic coast captured 250 Italians and Allied escapees, but on 14–17 October a smaller operation at Schio reported only one killed and 29 captured [A-2]. At Vetralla on 29 October a paratroop company from FJR 2 killed 14 and captured 35 [A-3]; at Pescia on 24 November units from LI Geb AK captured 102 Italians [A-4]; and on 2 January 1944 near Florence, Italian forces under LI Geb AK command killed

B

MAP B: PARTISAN WARFARE, SUMMER–AUTUMN 1944

This sketch map (with modern national borders) shows the development of partisan warfare from June/July to November 1944. In this case, overcrowding obliges us to omit the main roads as well as the railway lines.

Solid grey lines show the developing front line of the Allied advance from mid-September on the Gothic Line, to October–November. Also shown is the Germans' planned Voralpenstellung or 'Pre-Alpine Position' defence line in the north-east, which was ordered by Hitler at the end of August.

Pink shading indicates areas of partisan activity when at its peak in summer 1944.

Purple shading indicates, within and adjoining some of these, the 'free zones' created between June and November 1944: A = Val Ceno; B = Val Sesia; C = Val di Taro; D = Montefiorino; E = Valli di Lanzo; F = Dronero; G = Val Maira & Val Varaita; H = Val d'Enza & Parma; I = Eastern Friuli; K = Bobbio, including Torriglia; L = Carnia; M = Imperia; N = Val d'Ossola; O = Varzi; P = Tortonese; Q = Alto Monferrato; and R = Langhe, including the 'free zone' of Alba.

General areas of deployment

After 13 September 1944 the whole region south of the River Po was taken over for the purposes of anti-partisan operations by AOK 14 and AOK 10, which from then on deployed field and anti-partisan units. By October–November the territory from the Ligurian coast northwards to the Po, and west of an uneven north-south line drawn roughly through Mantua and Pistoia, came under Korps Lombardia of AOK 14. East of that boundary AOK 10 had responsibility south of the Po. In this broad region ceded to the Wehrmacht the areas of competence of SSPF Oberitalien-West and Oberitalien-Mitte had been shifted to the west.

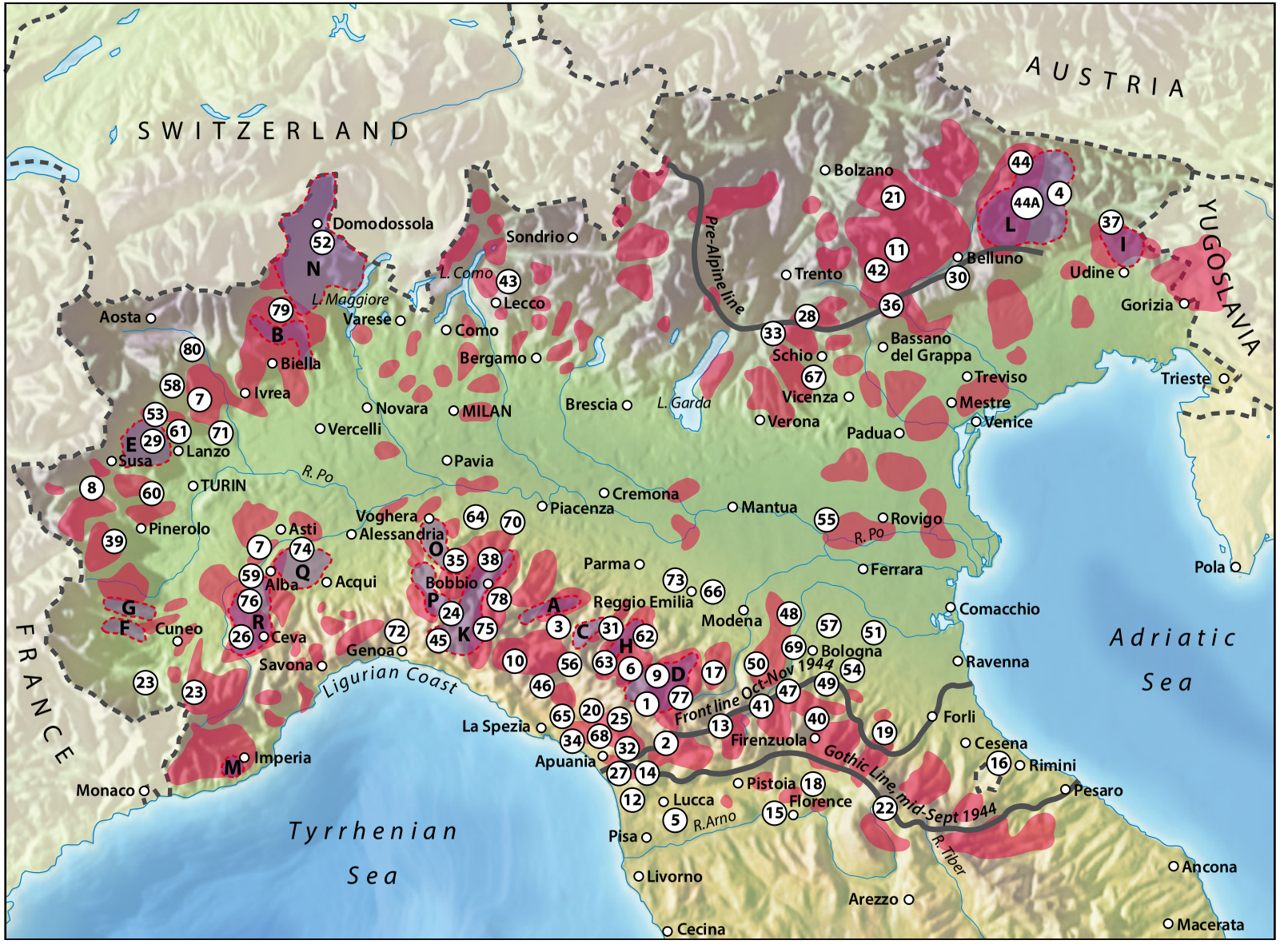
North of the Po, west of a line slanting up roughly from Turin north-eastwards to the Swiss frontier north-west of the Val-Sessia free zone **(area B),** was the LXXV AK area. The rest of northern Italy fell under AOK Ligurien, with the Italian CoGu acting as its rear-area command, eastwards to an irregular boundary slanting up roughly from Rovigo through Belluno. Territory east of this was the command of the Befehlshaber Venetzianische Küste (Korps Witthöft).

Operations

As on Map A, overcrowding prevents us indicating the base areas of specific German and RSI security units. Again, however, the latter can sometimes be inferred by cross-referencing the **ringed numbers** indicating separate anti-partisan operations from bracketed [B-numbers] in the body text. For example, in the north-western Alps, **ringed number 80** refers to [B-80] on page 47, Operation 'Paukenschlag' ('Kettledrum Hit'). This was carried out in the Aosta Valley on 3 February 1945 by the staff of Sich Rgt 38 commanding Ost-Btl 617 and 406, which were based east of Lanzo and north-west of Ivrea respectively. (Some wide-ranging operations have separate, **duplicated ringed numbers, e.g. 7 & 23**.)

Conversely, however, now that operations were being mounted by the field armies, troops were often assembled from wider areas than before. For example, **ringed number 74** north of Alba references [B-74] on page 46. This was the large-scale Operation 'Koblenz-Süd' in December 1944 by the temporary Kampfgruppe Drescher which wiped out the last partisan 'free zone', that of Monferrato **(area Q).** The KGr comprised parts of I/SS-Pol Rgt 15 from the Turin area, and of 162 ID from north of La Spezia, with support from various Flak troops, GNR and Black Brigade units.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com



© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

A roadblock on the outskirts of Rome early in 1944, manned by both German soldiers and policemen and the PAI (see Plate C3). These roadblocks were meant to prevent unauthorized troops from entering the 'open city', and to provide security checks on the main transport routes. (Crociani)

13 partisans and captured 7, at the price of 2 own killed and 19 wounded [A-5]. A series of sweeps led by I/SS-Pol Rgt 15 in the Vercelli area between 15 January and 13 February 1944 ended with 76 partisans killed and 20 captured, at the cost of 3 killed and 6 wounded [A-6], while on 20 January 1944 Fest Brig 135 searched the Sarzana area with unknown results [A-7].

By the end of 1943 partisan activity was still not seen by the Germans as a real threat, even though groups of up to 30–50 each were reportedly forming in north-west Italy and the central Apennines, and there had been some high-level assassinations (e.g. during November, the local Fascist party leader was killed along with the German MK commander at Ferrara, and the Fascist leader Aldo Resega in Milan). Still, partisan activity was quite limited; the MKs reported to Bev Gen HQ only 130 incidents between mid-October and mid-November 1943, dropping to 95 over the following month, and to 86 in December 1943–January 1944. However, there was a dramatic increase in sabotage and attacks, particularly against roads and railway lines, in January–February 1944, with a total of 348 by mid-February. Increased attacks against small German and Italian garrisons and cases of looting indicated that groups of growing size needed to arm and sustain themselves.

A group of German soldiers conferring during a security operation. They probably belong to II Btl/3 Brandenburg Rgt (see Plate C1); this Army 'commando' unit was often deployed to hunt down partisan groups all over Italy, from the Adriatic coast through the central Apennines and up to the north-western Alps. (ANPI)

Following the Allied landing at Anzio on 22 January 1944, and a national strike on 1–8 March in German-occupied cities, partisan activity started to spread geographically and to grow in numbers and quality. There were signs of better organization (e.g. in a single night the Modena railway was sabotaged at five points), and a switch to guerrilla tactics. The Germans guessed that Communist partisan groups were influenced by their political commissars to adopt 'Soviet'-type methods made

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

more effective by their leadership and armament, while avoiding clashes with German troops. There was a noticeable increase in partisan numbers in the central Apennines (2,000–3,000 in the region Modena–Forlì–Macerata), though mostly in small elements. In the north-western Alps larger groups already existed (e.g. the 'Mauri' group near Cuneo, estimated at 1,200 strong), making the threat more serious there than in central Italy.

Incidents continued to increase in number: Bev Gen reported 486 from mid-February to mid-March 1944, 439 in March–April, 545 in April–May, and 1,185 in May–June. The GNR's HQ also started to record statistics: 476 sabotages and attacks in January 1944, 944 in February, 2,177 in March, 1,421 in April, 2,385 in May, and 3,300 in June. At local level AGr von Zangen, which since 25 January 1944 had taken over coastal defence on both the Tyrrhenian and Adriatic Seas north of the latitude of Rome, reported 215 sabotages and attacks in February 1944, 318 in March, 199 in April, 312 in May, and 409 in June. Meanwhile, in March AOK 10 reported 42 attacks and 33 cases of looting in the Macerata–Ascoli Piceno area, and AOK 14 noted sabotage of communications in the areas of Terni, Rieti, Viterbo and Rome.

Notoriously, on 23 March 1944 a Patriotic Action Group attacked a company of III/Pol Rgt 'Bozen' in the Via Rasella in Rome, killing 33 men. This, the most important action of its kind in any Italian city, came as a shock to the German authorities, and the SD's response was immediate and savage. In reprisal, SS-Ostubaf Herbert Kappler ordered the killing of 335 Italian hostages in the Ardeatine caves.

Anti-partisan operations, spring 1944

German field units were still deployed at the front or to secure the coasts, and it was only in December 1943 that GFM Kesselring ordered that either Police or Army commanders might take command of local anti-partisan operations according to rank and seniority. The separate chains of command were only ordered to maintain close cooperation, although the creation of SSPF Oberitalien-West on 23 January 1944 (taking joint control of German SS and Police units, Italian police and GNR) brought the issue of deficient command and control to the fore at a time of increased partisan activity. After a high-level meeting on 22 March, on the 30th Kesselring issued an order that made field armies (AOK 10 and 14, AGr von Zangen) responsible for anti-partisan warfare in their areas; the rest of Italy apart from the Pre-Alpine and northern Adriatric Coast 'operations zones' remained in Gen Toussaint's hands, in cooperation with SS-Ogruf Wolff.

LEFT Spring 1944, northern Apennines: Luftwaffe troops from the 'Hermann Göring' Div (see Plate D3) check the papers of an Italian civilian. Judging by his age, they might suspect him of being a simple draft-dodger or a potential partisan. When combat divisions provided troops for security operations it was often the reconnaissance battalion that was deployed, by virtue of its useful balance of mobility and firepower. (ANPI)

RIGHT Many Luftwaffe ground personnel, easily identifiable by their pale khaki tropical uniforms, were switched to security duties. Here a driver is being questioned at a roadblock in the mountainous country west of Parma. Note that his car is fuelled by gas cylinders carried on the roof, and has blackened headlights and white-painted mudguards – evidence of both the shortage of petrol for civilian use, and the black-out measures ordered under the air-raid precautions. (Vitetti)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Photo taken in the Via Rasella, Rome, shortly after the partisan bomb attack on 23 March 1944 that killed 33 men of III/Pol Rgt 'Bozen'; here, survivors are still checking the area (see Plate E2). This attack led to the notorious SS massacre of hostages in the Ardeatine caves ordered by SS-Ostubaf Kappler. He would be one of the few German officers who would serve lengthy post-war prison sentences for war crimes committed in Italy – a punishment that his theatre commander SS-Ogruf Wolff notoriously escaped. (Vitetti)

On 3 April Himmler issued a decree, backdated to the 1st, declaring northern and central Italy a Bandenkampfgebiet ('Anti-Bandit Battle Area'), while at the same time Wolff created the SSPF Oberitalien-Mitte and Mittelitalien. The ensuing contradictions led to OKW intervening on 1 May 1944, now putting anti-partisan warfare (with the exceptions of the areas under control of the field armies, and the two 'operations zones') under Wolff's control, although subordinated to Kesselring. Ten days later, and again on 17 June, Kesselring issued a statement clarifying his own role as the ultimate authority over anti-partisan warfare in Italy, although Wolff was now acknowledged as the leader for anti-partisan warfare in '*Duce*-Italy' (i.e. regions outside the field armies' areas of competence), bound only by Kesselring's general guidelines.

C AUTUMN–WINTER 1943

(1) *Unteroffizier*, II/3 Brandenburg Regiment, central Italy
The lack of heavy field equipment, combined with the 9mm MP40 sub-machine gun and grenade, typifies the approach to anti-partisan warfare: soldiers had to move fast across country, and to be ready to open fire quickly, preferably at close range. This NCO is wearing the standard M1935 *Feldbluse* (field tunic), with shoulder straps of rank piped in infantry white. Members of this regiment were entitled to wear the Jäger oakleaves right-sleeve patch, but the right-forearm cuff title with the regiment's name was not authorized until 17 August 1944. Trousers made up in Italian camouflage material, from captured shelter-quarter/tent sections, were apparently quite popular in this unit.

(2) Ex-Italian Army officer partisan, northern Italy
Numbers of Italian soldiers who managed to escape disarming and capture by the Germans formed the first partisan groups. This ex-officer is still wearing the uniform of the Alpini mountain troops; although he has removed his branch-of-service collar patches and the cuff rank badges from his tunic, he still sports both the branch badge of the mountain artillery and the three gold braid chevrons of a *capitano* on his *'Alpino'* hat. The black stripes with yellow branch-of-service piping on his breeches identify a uniform of pre-war make. He is armed with a 9mm MAB 38 (Moschetto Automatico Beretta, 1938) sub-machine gun, which was in fact not widely issued before the Italian surrender.

(3) *Guardia, Polizia dell'Africa Italiana*, Rome
Following the Italian surrender in September 1943, some 1,500 well-armed and trained depot personnel of the colonial PAI (Italian Africa Police) were available to the authorities in Rome. The characteristic tropical helmet was retained with the khaki woollen winter uniform; the substantial, old-fashioned looking coat had a deep collar, and a fly front offset to the right. After Mussolini's downfall the PAI replaced the *fasci* on their collars with the Italian Army's five-point stars, worn until late spring 1944; they retained their azure-blue right shoulder aiguillettes. The brassard, in diagonal stripes of the red and yellow colours of Rome, bears in black lettering 'Open City of Rome/Police Auxiliaries'. The brown leather belt and suspender straps support two cartridge pouches on the right and a holstered 9mm Beretta 34 pistol on the left. His MAB 38 is a special version of the sub-machine gun with a detachable folding-blade bayonet.

(3a) Alternative version of the PAI brassard, with *'Polizia'* on horizontal stripes.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

The north-western Alps

Larger-scale anti-partisan operations started in March 1944. On 4–11 March, in the north-western Alps between Turin and Cuneo, I/SS-Pol Rgt 15 and Italian units killed 362 and took 97 prisoners in the Lanzo Valley [A-9]. On 21–31 March the same unit, among others including elements from the Italian Waffen-Miliz, carried out Operation 'Sperber' ('Sparrowhawk') in the Pellice Valley, killing at least 246 and taking 143 prisoners [A-19]. From 25 March to 5 April Operation 'Wien' in the Maira and Varaita valleys, carried out by elements of SS-Pol Rgts 12 and 15 and Ost-Btl 617, killed 84 and captured 384 [A-21].

On 9–13 April, Sich Rgt 38's Feld Gend Abt 541 and II/SS-Pol Rgt 15 carried out Operation 'Stuttgart' near Cuneo, but reported only 30 killed and several taken prisoner [A-28]. On 23–27 April, Sich Rgt 38 units (Feld Gend Abt 541, Ost-Btl 263 & II/IR 198) were back in action for Operation 'Tübingen' in the Stura Valley, inflicting 55 killed and 64 taken prisoner while burning 70 houses [A-36]. On 26 April–7 May, I/SS-Pol Rgt 15 with Waffen-Miliz elements swept an area west of Turin, killing 103 and taking 109 prisoners including 14 British [A-38].

The northern Apennines

Armeegruppe von Zangen, deployed to secure the Ligurian coastline in central and northern Italy, had an area of anti-partisan responsibility spreading from the coast right through the northern Apennines, and was soon in the forefront of the action. On 13–21 March a 2,500-strong Kampfgruppe, from 356 ID along with Italian elements, struck in the Tanaro and Casotto valleys, killing 283 and taking 246 prisoners [A-13]. Meanwhile on 18 March, Pz Aufkl Abt 'Hermann Göring', with support from other Luftwaffe, Gendarmerie and GNR units swept the Montefiorino area, killing 300 [A-15]; they were back in action on 19–20 March around Villa Minozzo, killing 78 [A-16]. These were the first anti-partisan operations carried out by the Pz Fsch Div 'Hermann Göring' in the area north of Livorno, where it had been redeployed to rest and refit in mid-March; it would be joined in mid-April by the incomplete RSI 'Lupo' Bn from Prince Junio Valerio Borghese's Xa MAS organization.

Other AGr von Zangen units were active on the Adriatic coast and in the northern Apennines. On 21 March elements from Korps Witthöft swept the Meldola area near the Adriatic coast, taking 25 prisoners [A-17], and struck again on 6–9 April in the Rimini area, killing 70 [A-26]. In the west, on 4–7 April elements from LXXV AK killed 9 and captured 35 near Monte Gottero [A-25]; and on 15–16 April German and Italian units from Fest Brig 135 killed 8 and captured 12 in the Pontremoli area [A-33]. Operations were also mounted by either local Army administrative or Police commands; on 5 March, MK 1015 and GNR elements in the Versilia area arrested 95 [A-8]. On 12 March men from Gendarmerie-Hauptmannschaft Emilien, with support from Luftwaffe troops, arrested 33 suspects in the Monte Santa Giulia area [A-12]. On 15 April, MK 1008 led an operation in the Montagnana area, killing 7 and taking 75 prisoners [A-32], and the following day 12 were killed near Villa Minozzo [A-14].

On 6–11 April, elements from 356 ID carried out an operation against the 3rd Garibaldi Bde north of Savona, reporting 145 killed, 75 of whom were executed in the Benedicta monastery (which was later burned down), plus 368 prisoners [A-27]. The 'Hermann Göring' Div was again active on 10–11 April, when elements with local support carried out an operation around Monte Morello that killed 23 and took 38 prisoners [A-29], followed by

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

another on 13–17 April in the Monte Falterona area that resulted in 289 killed and 115 taken prisoner [A-31]. On 3–5 May at Fivizzano, Pz Aufkl Abt 'Hermann Göring' along with other German and Italian units killed 143 and took 170 prisoners, all of whom were executed the following day [A-39]. All in all, up to April 1944 units under AGr von Zangen carried out 116 anti-partisan operations, killing some 4,300 and capturing another 2,400, while arresting more than 3,000 civilians. On 17 April, Operation 'Walfisch' ('Whale') was carried out in the Quadraro suburb of Rome, but this time only to gather up some 2,000 people for use in forced labour.

This increased tempo and scope of operations brought about a reduction in partisan activity in April 1944, and forced groups to fragment into smaller parties; however, as these dispersed they spread activity not only in the Apennines and the north-western Alps, but also in the northern Alps and in the Dolomites in the north-east. Attacks and sabotages also increased to coincide with the Allies' Operation 'Diadem' offensive on 11 May and the subsequent advances in the Liri Valley and from Anzio, which reached Rome on 4 June.

More widespread activity

Anti-partisan operations now began in the north-east: by III/SS-Pol Rgt 12 north of Verona on 9–10 March [A-11], and on 31 March–April in the Vajont Valley, where 3 people were killed and 150 taken prisoner [A-24]. Near Bolzano on 31 March–1 April, MK 1010 led an operation that recorded an identical result [A-22]. Equally unsuccessful was Operation 'Montebello' carried out on 20–30 May near Schio, resulting in 37 arrested [A-41]. Only on 4–5 June was a major operation made possible by the transfer of Ost-Btl 263 which, along with III/SS-Pol Rgt 12, mopped up the Asiago plateau [A-43].

Partisan activity also increased behind the front in the rear areas of AOK 14 and 10. The reaction included operations on 6–9 March near Manciano, where elements of 92 ID's GR 1060 captured 20 partisans, one of whom was executed [A-10]. The same infantry division was back in action on 22 March at Monte Bottigli, this time killing 10 and capturing 4 [A-18]. On 24–25 March, Korück 594 (a rear area command) was more successful near Macerata, killing 92 and capturing 11 [A-20]. The creation of a large area under partisan control north of Terni and Rieti by the 'Gramsci' Garibaldi Bde, which included large numbers of former Yugoslav POWs, led on 27 March to the creation of Oberst Ludwig Schanze's Stab für Bandenbekämpfung ('HQ for Anti-Bandit Warfare'), with under command II/3 Brandenburg Rgt (including the Blackshirt 'IX Settembre' Bn), I/SS-Pol Rgt 20, plus elements from Pz Aufkl Abts 103 and 190, and of Pz Abt 190 drawn from the Anzio front. Some of these 2,500–3,000 men had relevant experience: II/3 Brandenburg Rgt had already been active on the Adriatic coast in the Teramo–Ascoli Piceno area. On 28 March, Pz Aufkl Abt 103 (with a company from Fsch Pion Btl 4) carried out an operation north of Perugia that resulted in 57 killed and 64 taken prisoner.

On 29 March–7 April 1944 this command carried out Operation 'Oberst Schanze' north of Rieti–Terni, reporting no fewer than 296 killed and 698 taken prisoner [A-23], followed on 31 March–5 April by I/SS-Pol Rgt 20's Operation 'Eichkätzchen', and on 7–17 April by Operation 'Monte Tancia' in the mountain areas south-east of Perugia and between Terni and Rieti. On 12–13 April, Operation 'Osterei' ('Easter Egg') was executed in the Viterbo–Rieti area, the first of a series of large operations aimed at clearing the central Apennines; Oberst Schanze's staff, now with only II/3 Brandenburg Rgt and

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

I/SS-Pol Rgt 20, killed 38 (including 8 Americans) and captured 42 [A-30]. German claims for the period 15 March–15 April 1944 were 2,191 partisans killed and another 1,390 captured. The Stab für Bandenbekämpfung was subsequently disbanded and used to form a Lehrstab für Bandenbekämpfung ('Training HQ for Anti-Bandit Warfare').

On 10 April 1944, AOK 14 was ordered to surrender control of anti-partisan operations to the SSPF Mittelitalien; this added Gend Eins Kdo Bürger to the units available to a command eventually consisting of a Bandenbekämpfung Stab also known as KGr von Kamptz.

INSURGENCY: SUMMER 1944

The Allied advance continued north after reaching Rome on 4 June, and by mid-month it had pushed as far as the line Orbetello–Orvieto–Terni. Allied victories in Italy and news of the Normandy landings led to unrealistic optimism that the war might soon be over, prompting the start of nothing less than a partisan insurgency. Widespread desertions from RSI forces brought a further swelling of partisan ranks, and Allied airdrops provided some much-needed weapons and equipment. By July there were no fewer than 50,000 armed partisans: half in the Garibaldi brigades, 15,000 in the GL formations, and 10,000 in Catholic and independent groups. Including unarmed supporters, the total rose to about 80,000.

During summer 1944 partisan brigades in the field began forming 'divisions' of 3 to 12 brigades, while the Garibaldi formations developed Squadre di Azione Patriottica (SAP, 'Patriotic Action Squads') – mostly unarmed, but supporting partisan activities in the cities. On 19 June 1944 the military committee of the CLNAI announced a structure called the Corpo Volontari della Libertà ('Corps of Volunteers for Freedom'), which was intended to control partisan groups in northern Italy while liaising with the Allies; in the event, it only succeeded in keeping contact with those in the wider Milan area.

D

SPRING 1944

(1) Partisan, central Italy

Civilian partisans initially wore their everyday working or outdoor clothes, sometimes having opportunities to exchange them subsequently for whatever military items could be acquired. This man has a typical woollen pullover over a collarless shirt, and corduroy trousers; scarves in various colours were adopted by different groups, and his red bandanna shows his allegiance to the Garibaldi brigades. On his left arm a brassard in national colours bears the 'CLN' initials of the Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale (CLN, 'National Liberation Committee'). A broad, home-made canvas bandolier belt has pouches each holding several six-round clips for his 6.5mm M91 Carcano carbine with folding bayonet, the contents being held in place with blue cords. The pouch at his front right holds an M35 SRCM hand grenade, and on his trouser belt is a holster for a small Glisenti revolver.

(1a) Detail of one example of a CLN armband; the red and green were sometimes reversed.

(2) *Tenente, Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana*, northern Italy

This first lieutenant of the newly formed GNR ('National Republican Guard') is wearing the standard uniform of the Blackshirts militia with its black shirt and tie, but with new GNR badges. On the field cap a single stylized 'M' (for Mussolini) is stretched out like wings behind the Republican-style *fascio*, with the axe protruding at the top. The black 'double-flame' collar patches bear silver metal stylized 'double-Ms' shaped to recall the SS-runes. Rank is identified by a silver-braid diamond and stripes on black backing above his turn-up cuffs. He wears black-striped breeches with spurred riding boots, and his black 'Sam Browne' belt supports an Army-style dagger as well as a holstered Beretta 34 pistol.

(2a) Detail of cap badge, in light grey silk on grey-green backing.

(3) *Schütze, Fallschirm Panzer Aufklärungs-Abteilung 'Hermann Göring'*, central Italy

The use of Waffen-SS camouflage smocks within the Luftwaffe's 'Hermann Göring' Div was limited to combat troops like this armoured reconnaissance battalion, which was foremost in anti-partisan activity in March–April 1944. In the Italian spring, which resembled the German summer, it was customary for German troops to wear tropical uniform under their camouflage clothing. This machine-gunner is armed with a Luger P08 pistol for self-defence, and carries a 7.92mm MG15 machine gun (initially used on aircraft, but adapted for ground use) with its typical 'saddle' drum-magazine.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

1

1a

2

2a

3

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

An unidentified group of partisans with members of an SOE mission, clearly including (left) an Italian agent. The initial missions were made up entirely of Italians, and mixed-nationality teams were parachuted in only from mid-June 1944. The first three were inserted in the north-east, Tuscany, and on the Adriatic coast, led by Maj Hedley Vincent (the 'Coolant' mission), Maj Vivian Johnston, and Maj John Henderson ('Marcasite') respectively. In early August, Maj Neville Darewski ('Temple') made contact with the 'Mauri' group near Cuneo, and subsequently with Capt Patrick O'Regan's mission dropped near Turin later the same month, and the 'Toffee' mission established contact with the 47th Garibaldi Bde at Parma. Three more missions were sent to the north-east during August: Maj John Wilkinson ('Ruina') on the Asiago plateau, and those of Maj Harold Tilman and Capt Paul Brietsche dropped in the mountainous Belluno–Grappa areas. (Vitetti)

Local commands, already forming in April–May, were now established in central and northern Italy to provide some sort of coordinated guidance.[3]

SOE missions and support

Moves to strengthen and coordinate the partisan formations were two features of a change of strategy in summer 1944, which was encouraged by a collapse of RSI security forces. A radio appeal by FM Sir Harold Alexander on 27 July 1944 promised Allied support to the partisans, but both the British SOE and American OSS had been active in Italy (independently of each other) since even before the surrender. The OSS had carried out 13 missions behind enemy lines up to March 1944, and the SOE 25 up to May. Nevertheless, in June 1944 they still lacked information about the actual location and activities of partisan groups, and consequently the first British Liaison Officers (BLOs) were parachuted in to make contact, assess the situation, establish radio communications, and arrange for airdrops of supplies. The first BLOs were Maj Hedley Vincent, leading the 'Coolant' mission in the north-east on 9/10 June, and Maj Vivian Johnston, dropped on 15/16 June in Tuscany. The latter eventually made contact with the partisans in Reggio Emilia and reached the Montefiorino 'free zone', where he was joined by Capt Jim Davies and the 'Albergo' mission, which anticipated an (in fact aborted) airdrop by 500 Italian paratroopers from the 'Nembo' Regt of the Co-Belligerent Army.

Other SOE missions followed. In July 1944 SOE was operating 16 radio stations behind enemy lines, and its missions rose from 23 in August to 33 in September; meanwhile the OSS had 12 in place, plus another 6 ready to leave. Contacts between Allied teams and partisan formations made large-scale airdrops of supplies possible. In May 1944, 152 tons were dropped; 361 tons were delivered in June, 446 tons in July, 227 tons in August, and 252 tons in September.

The 'free zones'

A change in partisan strategy was already noticeable in June 1944 when, thanks to a collapse of the GNR, they were able to take control of increasingly large areas that were no longer simply 'sanctuaries' but so-called 'free zones', or even 'partisan republics'. The first was formed on 10–11 June in Val Ceno [B, area A] and the nearby Val di Taro [B, area C] in the northern Apennines, followed on 17 June by Montefiorino [B, area D], and at the end of the month by Val Parma [B, area H]. In the north-western Alps 'free zones' were formed on 11 June in the Sesia Valley [B, area B] and, at the end of the month, in the Lanzo [B, area E] and Maira [B, area G] valleys, and Dronero [B, area F]. In the north-east, the 'free zone of Eastern Friuli' was formed on 30 June [B, area I]. On 7 July the 'free zone' of Bobbio [B, area K] was formed

3 A Tuscany command had formed in November 1943 but was soon dismantled by the Germans. One formed in Lombardy in March–April 1944; in Emilia Romagna in April; in Tuscany again in May; and in Piedmont, Liguria and Veneto in July.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

north-east of Genoa; in late July, that of Carnia [B, area L]; and at the end of August, that of Imperia [B, area M].

While the partisan-controlled areas were envisaged as providing bases for large-scale offensive operations following the model of Tito's Yugoslav partisans, their premature establishment was actually a distraction that led to a reduction in partisan activity. After a peak of 3,300 incidents in June 1944, in July the GNR reported 2,718, dropping to 2,560 in August and to 1,965 in September. Activity only increased in the Milan–Po Valley plains areas, and a CLNAI order of 20 August to switch to a defensive posture practically acknowledged this situation.

Three partisans cheerfully posing after having been supplied with air-dropped uniforms and weapons. As well as British battledress they display an M3 Thompson sub-machine gun, an American 60mm M2 mortar, and an M42 Marlin sub-machine gun. (Molinari)

Collapse of RSI security forces

In spite of the fact that early partisan activity had mainly targeted the Fascists, the RSI reaction had been sloppy and belated. In the period December 1943–February 1944 the GNR reported a total of 178 anti-partisan operations, but none in more than single-company strength; these resulted in 254 killed and 487 captured, plus 3,140 civilians arrested, but at the cost of no fewer than 333 RSI killed and 1,840 wounded. Figures for January–February 1944 give a total of 2,783 partisans killed, wounded or captured. During March–June 1944 the GNR and ENR carried out a monthly average of 240 operations, which reportedly inflicted a total of some 20,000 losses on the partisans; this made their support worthwhile to the Germans, although the GNR were rated as of lower operational value and reliability than the Carabinieri. Clearly, as late as April 1944, the RSI wanted to seek some sort of arrangement with at least some of the partisans; on 18 April a law was passed that imposed punishments for partisan activity, but offered an amnesty to those who surrendered voluntarily.

The need to enhance the RSI's anti-partisan effort was first raised by the Italians at a conference on 29 February 1944, and, in spite of Kesselring's reluctance, this led to the creation on 18 March of the Centro Addestramento Reparti Speciali (CARS). This was followed on 1 April by authorization for three regiments of Cacciatori degli Appennini ('Apennine Hunters' or light infantry) with personnel drafted from the ENR, GNR and Fascist party, though in the event only two such regiments would actually be formed.

Men from 1o Regt of the Cacciatori degli Appennini on patrol, summer 1944. The creation of three regiments of these Italian Republican Army anti-partisan light infantry was authorized on 1 April 1944, but on 10 May the embryo force was ordered to surrender large numbers of men for the four ENR field divisions being formed in Germany, thus leaving only two regiments with a total strength on 2 June 1944 of 4,220 men. (Vitetti)

The Allied advance and partisan insurgency in early summer 1944 led to a collapse of the already disorganized RSI security apparatus. In June, Carabinieri started to defect in large numbers; in August the Germans tried to disarm them for use as Flak auxiliaries in Germany, and on 25 August the RSI decided to disband what was left of them. This robbed Mussolini at a stroke of 35,000 Carabinieri then stationed throughout his nominal territory. The GNR shrank from 103,000 men on 20 June to fewer than 74,000 on 12 August, of whom about 34,000 were on surveillance and security duties, mainly in the cities; some 12,000 in training schools and the GGL; and only 5,100 in combat units. On 14 August, *Il Duce* acknowledged the failure of the GNR by placing it under Army command.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

The 8a Brigata Nera parading in the Duomo square, Milan, in summer 1944. All the 41 urban Brigate Nere that were (at least theoretically) formed would be named after Fascist heroes; Milan's 8th Bde bore that of the local party leader Aldo Resega, killed by partisans on 18 November 1943. These *squadristi* wear the Black Brigades' standard uniform of black shirt, grey-green trousers and black peaked field cap – compare with Plate F1. (Molinari)

On 21 June Mussolini had already agreed to militarize the Fascist party by the creation of the Brigate Nere ('Black Brigades'), and on the 27th he wrote to FM Rodolfo Graziani giving him the task of crushing the partisans. The meetings held on 28 June between Gen Toussaint and RSI military leaders revealed that only about 10,000 Italians were available for anti-partisan deployment, mostly from the still-forming Cacciatori degli Appennini units already under German command. After moving them to the north-east under SS-Gruf von Kamptz's orders, on 19 July SS-Ogruf Wolff had the two regiments moved back to the north-west to prepare for large-scale operations.

Anti-partisan operations, spring-summer

Operations in the central Apennines in April–May had not achieved particularly impressive results. On 17–23 April, Stab von Kamptz's Operation 'Adler' ('Eagle') in the Ancona–Macerata area [A-34], and another north of Assisi on 26 April–1 May by I/SS-Pol Rgt 20, Gend-Hauptmannschaft Umbrien, GNR units and the Waffen-Miliz's 'Debica' Bn, had collectively claimed 154 killed and 119 captured [A-37]. An AOK 14 operation on 23 April in the Monte Amiata area saw 250 suspects arrested [A-35], and I/SS-Pol Rgt 20 mopped up in the Pesaro area south of Rimini on 7–9 May.

On 16 May, Bandenbekämpfung Stab von Kamptz was practically disbanded; its duties were taken over by SSPF Mittelitalien before it was ordered to withdraw north to near Modena on 20 May. In early June it was transformed into SSPF West-Emilien, operating until 14 August in the Bologna–Pistoia area, mostly with Bandenbekämpfung Stab Grün West ('Green West'). 'Green' was the German codename for the Gothic Line defences, which ran from north of the Arno rivermouth in the west to Pesaro on the Adriatic, forming a shallow L-shape. SSPF West-Emilien now had under command Geb Jäg Schule 'Mittenwald' ('Mountain Troops School'), and Hochgebirgs Jäger Btl 3 & 4 ('Alpine Troops Bns') were used to protect

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Men of the Luftwaffe Sicherungs Rgt Italien watching a group of houses burning after an operation in summer 1944. The regiment, formed in June from ground personnel of Luftflotte 2, was soon active in north-west Italy, before being transferred to the north-east in September. (ANPI)

the central Gothic Line in the Apennines. On 15 August, SS-Gruf von Kamptz took over command as SSPF Oberitalien-Mitte, which also created Bandenbekämpfung Stab Grün Ost.

The north-western Alps

In May the Germans were already launching large-scale operations across this region to prevent the creation of enlarged partisan formations. On 10–18 May, Operation 'Habicht' ('Hawk') was the baptism of fire for the still-forming Italian Waffen-SS brigade (then known as Sturmbrigade Pinerolo), when two battalions from its 1. Rgt swept the Sangone Valley [A-40]. On 28 May–3 June, I & II/SS-Pol Rgt 15 and part of III/SS-Pol Rgt 12 with GNR support formed a 3,150-strong battlegroup under SS-Brigaf Tensfeld for the largely unsuccessful Operation 'Hamburg' north of Biella [A-42], before moving to the Domodossola area. There, on 11–28 June, Operations 'Köln' and 'Freiburg' were carried out by some 4,800 men, this time successfully clearing the 'Fiamme Verdi' partisan formations out of the area [A-46].

The Italian SS volunteers of Sturmbrigade Pinerolo were back in action on 25 June–5 July for Operation 'Bayreuth' in the Sesia Valley alongside I/SS-Pol Rgt 20 and the GNR's 'Pontida' Bn, and again on 26 June–8 July in the Susa Valley, this time supported by the GNR's M29 and 115 Bns and Armd Gp 'Leonessa' [A-54 & A-50]. The first action succeeded in driving 'Cino' Moscatelli's 1st Garibaldi Div out of the area and putting an end to the 'free zone' of the Sesia Valley [B, area B]; the second killed 50 men of the 17th Garibaldi Brigade. The newly formed Luftwaffe Sich Rgt Italien ('Air Force Security Regiment Italy') was soon engaged in a series of operations around Cuneo on 30 June–2 July, 15–23 July and 26–30 July, which received some air support [A-55].

Operation 'Dragoon', the Allied landing in southern France on 15 August 1944, compelled immediate responses. On 16–17

Partisan leader Vincenzo 'Cino' Moscatelli (left), the commander of a 'Gramsci' partisan group who became political commissar of the 6th Garibaldi Bde in the Sesia Valley area, where he subsequently led the 1st Garibaldi (or Sesia Valley) Division. Here he wears the red collar patches with edelweiss badges that were adopted by the Garibaldi units forming the Divisione Valsesia (see Plate F2); non-Communist units in the Ossola Valley wore the edelweiss on green patches. At the turn of June/July 1944 the German Operation 'Bayreuth' drove Moscatelli's formation out of the so-called 'free zone' of the Sesia Valley north of Biella. (ANPI)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Officers photographed at the Italian SS barracks in Milan, March 1944. From left: Waffen-Untersturmführer Pio Filippani Ronconi; Waffen-Obersturmbannführer Carlo degli Oddi, commander of II Btl; and Oberleutnant Karl Häsecker, a liaison officer of the Ordnungspolizei. Both Italians wear silver-edged red collar patches – plain on the right collar, and with the usual silver SS rank insignia, for second lieutenant and lieutenant-colonel respectively, on the left. The rank-title prefix 'Waffen' was used in all non-Germanic SS units. (Vitetti)

August two battalions from 34 ID were sent west of Cuneo to clear access to passes across the Alps, while a Kampfgruppe from 90 Pz Gren Div (Pz Gren Rgt 200, I/Pz Gren Rgt 361 & Pz Aufkl Abt 190), already held in reserve, was sent into the area. From 19 to 23 August the KGr 90 Pz Gren Div fought its way across the mountains, clashing with the partisans of the GL 1st Alpine Div, which since late June/early July had formed the 'free zones' of Dronero and Val Maira [B, areas F & G]. On 23 August, despite this resistance and Allied air support, the Germans managed to secure the Maddalena Pass, thus opening the way for the withdrawal of 148 ID from France; meanwhile 157 ID made its way across the northern Alps, whence partisans fled into France. Kampfgruppe 90 Pz Gren Div continued to mop up the area until mid-September [B-23], joined from late August by 5 Geb Div, withdrawn from the front to be deployed along the Alps. The Lehr Btl Geb Jäg Schule 'Mittenwald' and Hochgebirgs Jäger Btl 4 had already been sent there, eventually joined by II/3 Brandenburg; mopping-up operations continued into late September, eventually clearing the 'free zone' of Imperia [B, area M]. On 12 September the organization of AOK Ligurien was officially authorized: LXXV AK was deployed in the western Alps, while Korps Lombardia (formed on 31 August) was deployed along and behind the coast.

The central Apennines

If northern Italy was still relatively secure, with all the main cities controlled by the GNR, Italian police and the still-forming Black Brigades, the central Apennines saw an ever-increasing and active partisan presence that soon generated something of a psychosis among the Germans. Now obliged to face both the advancing Allies and a partisan threat in their rear, for the first time they had to acknowledge that the contemptuously termed 'gangsters' represented a genuine threat to the movement of troop reserves, as well as a menace to security in rear areas. The spreading partisan groups in the central Apennines, particularly near the Adriatic coast, would soon make contact with the Allied advance; in some cases they would scout for them, in others they would actually take control of towns themselves.

One mark of heightened German concern was the order issued by GFM Kesselring on 1 July 1944 authorizing the pre-emptive taking of hostages, to be executed, and their homes destroyed, whenever German soldiers were killed by partisans. It is worth noting that it was in the summer of 1944 that German troops killed some 5,000 out of the total of about 7,500 Italian civilians whom they executed between March 1944 and April 1945.

Clearing the rear areas of the withdrawing armies in the central Apennines became a necessity. On 9–13 June, III Pol Frw Btl 'Italien' along with elements from 19 Luftwaffe Feld-Div swept the area around Cecina, capturing 120 partisans [A-44], and on 20 June elements from the medical unit (unusually) of 4. Fsch Jäg Div killed 25 partisans and took 38 prisoners (18 of whom were

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

executed) at Figline Valdarno [A-47]. On 20–28 June, II/3 Brandenburg, before moving to the north-west, killed 55 north of Arezzo [A-52]. On 25 June, in a reprisal action following the capture of a German colonel, Pz Jäg Abt 334 arrested 560 civilians, though they were eventually released [A-49]. On 29 June elements from 19 Lw Feld Div were back in action at Guardistallo, killing 82 [A-53].

Armee Abteilung von Zangen (redesignated on 21 May) was also heavily involved before reverting on 4 July to LXXXVII AK, and eventually forming, on 1 August, the AOK Liguria. The action carried out on 13 June by elements from its Fest Brig 135, which killed 149 and arrested 51 at Forno [A-45], is indicative of the sort of war now being fought. Up to early July 1944, AA von Zangen reported a total of 175 anti-partisan operations, with 6,726 partisans killed, 3,630 taken prisoner and 5,454 civilians arrested, at the cost of 410 own killed, 1,082 wounded and 193 missing. The dramatically increased proportion of killed to arrested on 13 June clearly indicates that those whom the Germans claimed to be 'partisans' were often simply civilians.

Apparently photographed during a training march, these men are from the Italian Waffen-SS brigade; this was initially designated 1. Sturmbrigade der italienische Freiwillige Legion as part of the Waffen-Miliz, and from September 1944 as Waffen-Grenadier Brigade der SS (italienische Nr 1). In spite of its SS status the unit was almost entirely equipped with Italian uniforms and weapons, though with special insignia – note the eagle-and-*fascio* version of the SS sleeve eagle, on red backing. The man on the left carries a 45mm M35 Brixia platoon mortar. From its baptism of fire in Operation 'Habicht' ('Hawk') in the Sangone Valley in mid-May 1944, this was among the most effective Italian units deployed for anti-partisan warfare. (Vitetti)

The northern Apennines

At the end of June, with the Allies pressing up south of the line Siena–Arezzo–Ancona, SSPF West Emilien commenced activity against partisans in the northern Apennines. On 24–25 June an operation at Bettola led to a mass killing of civilians [A-48], while on the 28th a company from Gend Eins Kdo Bürger reported more than 20 killed and 30 captured at Piandelagotti [A-51]. In this zone, too, the security situation deteriorated to the point of requiring large-scale operations, such as Operation 'Wallenstein I' by 5,000–6,000 men on 30 June–7 July along the roads linking La Spezia with Parma and Reggio Emilia. This was carried out by Luftwaffe Flak and ground units, plus Fest Brig 135, the ENR's 'Lupo' Bn, GNR elements, and a company from III/SS-Pol Rgt 12. At the cost of 5 own killed and 17 wounded and missing they killed 325 and took 2,769 prisoners, while putting an end to the Val Ceno 'free zone' [A-56; B, area A]. An operation carried out at Piandelagotti on 5 July by elements of Gend Eins Kdo Bürger, Feld Gend Abt 692 and Flak troops [B-1] was less successful; and the Bürger Kommando's last operation in the region, 'Belvedere' on 11–12 August at Monte Cimone along with I/Pz Gren Rgt 9, resulted in only 16 killed and 15 arrested [B-13].

In July 1944 anti-partisan operations focused on the western area of the northern Apennines. On 14 July the Lehr Btl ('Training Bn') of Geb Jäg Schule 'Mittenwald' arrested 93 (of whom 21 were later executed) in the Montefegatesi area [B-2]. More successful was Operation 'Wallenstein II' on 19–26 July, carried out south-west of Parma by elements of Fest Brig 135 along with Flak units, III/SS-Pol Rgt 12, Gend Eins Kdo Bürger and the

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

'Lupo' Bn; this eliminated the 'free zone' of Val di Taro, resulting in 45 killed and 127 taken prisoner of whom 30 were later executed [B-3; B, area C]. North of Pisa on 23 July, elements from 65 ID killed 47 and took 26 prisoners [B-5]; and on the 27th–29th, Geb Jäg Schule 'Mittenwald' closed down the Val d'Enza and Val Parma 'free zones' between Apuania and Reggio Emilia, killing at least 25 in the process [B-6; B, area H]. The most successful action took place on 1–7 August, when Luftwaffe and Flak units along with Gend Eins Kdo Bürger carried out Operation 'Wallenstein III' in the Montefiorino–Piandelagotti area against some 5,000 partisans of the 'Modena' and 'Reggio' Garibaldi Divs, which were waiting to meet a planned airdrop by the Allies' Italian 'Nembo' Para Regiment. Although most of the partisans fled, they still suffered 150 killed and wounded [B-9; B, area D].

Florence

In the first week of June the Garibaldi brigades in the Siena–Grosseto area had already formed the 'Spartaco Lavagnini' Garibaldi Div with about 1,000 men, joined in mid-July by the 1,600-odd of the 'Arno' Garibaldi Div formed from units in the Florence–Arezzo region. Both started to move towards Florence (where they would be joined by the GL 'Rosselli' Bdes) as the British Eighth Army approached the city. Partisans started to infiltrate the part of Florence south of the Arno river on 1 August, but, under fire from German and Fascist snipers and very short of weapons themselves, they were unable to prevent the destruction of the bridges (apart from the Ponte Vecchio) on the night of 3/4 August, shortly before linking up with advancing Allied troops. Partisans continued to infiltrate the city after the Germans withdrew to the northern quarters on 7–10 August. On the 14th a patrol from FJR 11 killed 11 partisans, decimating a command group in the city centre [B-15], and a fierce struggle continued until the German withdrawal north of Florence on 17 August and its occupation by Indian troops. On the 18th a small mopping-up operation north of the city ('Hypodrom') killed some 45

E

SPRING–SUMMER 1944

(1) Partisan, *Battaglione 'Silvio Corbari'*; Apennine Mountains, summer 1944

This motley outfit is typical of the period after the first large-scale British supplies began reaching partisan groups during the summer. It comprises a captured GNR field cap, a civilian shirt and scarf, a British Army battledress blouse, and civilian knickerbocker sporting trousers worn with long socks and Italian Army boots. Above the left pocket is a patch in national colours bearing in roughly embroidered cursive script 'Com di Liber Naz/BTG/Silvio Corbari', identifying a unit named after a partisan leader who was killed on 18 August 1944 by II/3 Brandenburg Regiment. Makeshift fabric pouch sets, like those holding magazines for this man's Sten gun, were common.

(2) *Wachtmeister, III/Polizei Regiment 'Bozen'*; Rome, March 1944

The Police Regt 'Bozen' was the first to be raised amongst ethnic Germans in the South Tyrol in 1943, partly from volunteers and partly by conscription. The use of Ordnungspolizei uniforms was normal; some photos show both Police helmet decals displayed, although apparently not all members of this unit wore the Police eagle on the left sleeve. Some Italian equipment was issued, such as the ammunition pouches and the long Carcano M91 rifle. This NCO is from the 11th Company, which fell victim to the Via Rasella partisan ambush in Rome on 23 March. Following this, the unit was granted the 'SS' designation on 16 May 1944.

(3) *Maresciallo dei Carabinieri*, northern Italy, spring 1944

The Carabinieri, like the French Gendartmerie Nationale, are a militarized nationwide police force. This senior warrant officer is wearing the traditional midnight-blue uniform, with silver-and-black braid around the cap band, red piping, and red bands on the trousers; the use of Army grey-green uniforms was restricted to those mobilized to serve as military police. Some Carabinieri insignia are retained; however, the 'bomb' of the silver cap badge has had the king's initials removed, and incorporation into the GNR is denoted by new collar badges in silver on red backing – a small-size reproduction of the *'alamari'* bars with the 'double-M' superimposed. The red-piped shoulder boards bear the single silver-and-black braid line of this rank.

(Background) This signboard warns German vehicle drivers to telephone ahead to the nearest local HQ before getting on the road through insecure areas. It reads: *'Bandengebiet/ Kraftfahrer erkundige Dich/ vor der Weiterfahrt/ bei der naeschsten Platz-/ bzw. Orstkommandantur!'*

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Street fighting in Florence, August 1944. The partisans were mostly fighting enemy snipers, and were handicapped by a shortage of weapons; in this group only three have rifles, two have only handguns, while the others are unarmed. A British Liaison Officer, Maj Charles MacIntosh, reported that of some 3,000 partisans in Florence only about 900 had rifles; unsurprisingly, any attempts to attack German positions were repulsed. (Vitetti)

partisans and wounded 40 [B-18]. Clearly the partisans still lacked the strength and capability to rise on their own, and much depended on the developing strategic situation.

Men from Prince Junio Valerio Borghese's Xa MAS marine infantry formation, which in September 1944 would become the Div Decima, with a strength of about 3,400 men. While occasionally deployed in the front line facing the Allies, its battalions were mostly active against partisans in both the north-west and north-east of Italy. The smocks made from Italian camouflage material, and sets of fabric belly-pouches for sub-machine gun magazines, are characteristic. (Vitetti)

Liguria, and the *Comando Contro Guerriglia*

At the end of July and in early August 1944 the ENR's 3rd 'San Marco' and 4th 'Monterosa' Divs returned from their training in Germany. They were deployed west and east of Genoa as part of the newly formed AOK Ligurien that was intended to face any Allied landings in the area, for which 90 Pz Gren Div was being held in reserve. The fact that partisans effectively controlled not only most of the border areas with France and Switzerland in the west and north, but also large areas of the northern Apennines and territory south and south-east of Turin, made the situation even more serious, prompting countermeasures from early July.

On 3–5 July a series of meetings between the SSPF Oberitalien-West, SS-Brigaf Tensfeld, and Italian military leaders led to the creation on 25 July of the Comando Contro Guerriglia (Comando CoGu, 'Anti-Guerrilla Command'). Formally under authority of the ENR chief of staff, it was in fact to act as a rear-area command for AOK Ligurien, with the task of clearing the region of partisans under Wolff's directives and Tensfeld's operation orders. Apart from the 'Folgore' Para Regt, eventually deployed in the western Alps, most of the ENR's operational units were put under command of CoGu in order to carry out three major anti-partisan operations: in the northern Alps around Aosta, in the western frontier area of Susa, and in the vicinity of Cuneo.

The first unit available was Prince Borghese's still-forming Divisione Decima (echoing the

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

title of Borghese's former Navy elite unit, the Xa MAS Flotilla – 'Decima MAS'). This was deployed at SS-Ogruf Wolff's disposal north of Turin at the turn of June/July, and was followed at the end of July by the bulk of the two Cacciatori degli Appennini regiments, deployed south-east of Turin along with 1a Brigata Nera Mobile 'Capelli'. On 30 July 1944 two 'combat groups' began operations. North of Turin, the Raggruppamento Borghese (Div Decima, I/SS-Pol Rgt 15 and elements of the GNR's 115 Bn, totalling some 2,100 Italians and 450 Germans) made its way across the Val Locana and cleared the nearby Val Orco and Val Soana south of Aosta, fighting against the 2nd and 4th Garibaldi and 6th GL Divs plus two Matteotti brigades. Operations continued until the end of August, costing the group 24 Italians and 6 Germans killed, 50 Italians (including Borghese and the Fascist party leader Alessandro Pavolini) and 45 Germans wounded, and 23 Italians missing, while inflicting on the partisans 269 killed, 2 wounded and 172 taken prisoner [B-7, north].

Ivrea, July 1944: a 'Justice and Freedom' partisan named Ferruccio Nazionale, hanged by Xa MAS troops. This formation was infamous for its effectiveness in fighting partisans; more information on its history and uniforms will be found in Elite 191, *Italian Navy & Air Force Elite Units & Special Forces 1940–45*. (Vitetti)

Less successful was the Raggruppamento Farina (under the commander of CARS) in the Langhe and Monferrato areas south of Turin. Its 1,300-strong Cacciatori degli Appennini declined in number to 1,100 by mid-August, but increased again at the end of the month with the arrival of the 500-strong II/1 Battaglione. Most anti-partisan activity depended upon the support of the 800-strong 1a Brig Nera Mob; the 3,400-man Gruppe Heldmann (including two battalions from 34 ID, though these were soon withdrawn, leaving only 450 Germans); Waffen-Miliz artillery, and two companies from the police Legione 'Muti' [B-7, south].

Operation 'Nachtigall' ('Nightingale'), carried out on 29 July–20 August in the Val Susa area west of Turin, was much more successful. Two combat groups were assembled from the Waffen-Miliz, Lw Sich Rgt, elements from Ost-Btl 617, from the GNR including Armd Gp 'Leonessa', 1a Brig Nera Mob 'Capelli' from Turin, and the 'Nembo' Bn from the ENR 'Folgore' Para Regt – in all some 3,000 men. The area, defended by about 1,000 partisans of the 1st Independent Div, was cleared with partisan losses of 122 killed and 103 taken prisoner [B-8]. During August a total of 1,326 partisans were claimed killed and 227 taken prisoner.

The new phase, September 1944: operations by field-army units

The start of the British Operation 'Olive' on 25 August, the attack against the Adriatic end of the Gothic Line, prompted a new phase of anti-partisan warfare. On 13 September SS-Ogruf Wolff agreed to relinquish the entire country south of the River Po to the field armies, while his anti-partisan operations in the north-west would be completed before switching focus to the north-east. The latter region's importance had been increased by Hitler's order at the end of August to build a 'last stand' defence line there called the Voralpenstellung or 'Pre-Alpine Position'.

The German withdrawal from the Arno to the 'Green' or Gothic Line in the northern Apennines coincided with a series of anti-partisan operations in

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Two partisans of the Brigata Volante Severino ('Severino Flying Brigade'), a unit of the 3rd Garibaldi Div 'Cichero' in Liguria. On the left, Dionigio Marchelli holds a rare American M42 Marlin sub-machine gun provided by the Office of Strategic Services. (ANPI)

which 16. SS-Pz Gren Div 'Reichsführer-SS' (and particularly SS-Pz Aufkl Abt 16) earned a grim reputation. Their first action, on 11 August near Lake Massaciuccoli, saw some of their 77 prisoners executed 'while trying to escape' [B-12], and on 12–13 August at Sant'Anna di Stazzema 270 partisans were killed and 353 suspects captured, while two villages were burned down [B-14]. On 19 August at Bardine di San Terenzo, a reprisal following the killing of 16 and the wounding of 6 German soldiers led to 53 executions and the village being burned down [B-20]. The unit continued to leave a trail of blood behind them: on 24–26 August a major sweep in the area of Monte Sagro recorded at least 332 killed, 1,480 arrested, and 17 villages destroyed [B-25]. A series of operations carried out in reprisal for attacks by the 'Stella Rossa' Garibaldi Bde led, on 4–7 September, to 36 partisans being killed and 377 captured east of Viareggio [B-27]; and on the 10th, after a partisan attack on the local Brigata Nera, 43 partisans were killed north of Apuania [B-32]. On the 15th, west of Apuania, 2 partisans were killed, 11 captured and 200 civilians arrested [B-34]. SS-Pz Aufkl Abt 16's most gruesome exploits were committed on 29–30 September, with massacres at Monte Sole and Marzabotto in which at least 718 people were killed (497 of them reportedly partisans) and 456 civilians deported, at the cost of 7 own killed and 29 wounded [B-41].

Four partisan leaders photographed in the Susa Valley: (left to right) Sandro Ciamei, commander 42nd Garibaldi Bde, and Andrea Coletto, both wearing camouflage jackets; Carlo Ambrino, commander 4th Garibaldi Div, wearing a British battledress blouse; and Elido Accornero. (ANPI)

Minor operations were meanwhile being carried out in the Adriatic sector south of the Po. On 14 August, 162 (Turk) ID captured and hanged 3 partisans at Rimini [B-16]. On the 17th, to the west, a Bandenjagdkommando ('bandit-hunting commando') killed 31 and took 11 prisoners near Ospitaletto [B-17]. On 18 August II/3 Brandenburg Rgt, which would shortly be moved to the Alps to become part of 157 ID, captured and executed the partisan leaders Corbari and Casadei at Castrocaro [B-19]. On 20–21 August, Operation 'Maskenball' ('Masked Ball') at Badia Prataglia by elements of 44 ID ended with 15 killed and 309 civilians arrested [B-22], and on 28 September the same unit would kill another 50 north of Firenzuola [B-40]. A minor success was achieved on 8–11 September by AOK 14 troops south-west of Reggia Emilia, where 10 partisans were killed and a group of 80–100 dispersed [B-31].

The Ligurian coast and the entire north-west were still the area most vulnerable to partisans,

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Summer 1944: after being dropped by truck close to their operation area, troops from a GNR unit rest before going into action; the black berets indicate men from an officers' training course. Most of the weapons on the right are 6.5mm Carcano carbines, with only a few 8mm Breda 37 heavy machine guns. (Crociani)

however. It soon became clear that the ENR divisions were far from ready for combat; in September 1944 the 'Saluzzo' Bn of the 'Monterosa' Div had to be disbanded after mass desertions to the partisans, and the 'Vestone' Bn would suffer the same fate in November. One result was that only 132 anti-partisan operations were carried out in the area from August to October 1944. A first major operation was carried out on 3–4 August at Monte Gottero by elements from Fest Brig 135, Geb Jäg Schule 'Mittenwald', and two battalions from the 'Monterosa' Div (soon replaced by the 'Lupo' Bn from Div Decima). The operation reported 630 killed and 12 captured and executed [B-10]. For the rest of August elements from the 'Monterosa' Div along with GNR and German units searched the Trebbia Valley east of Genoa, to clear the road across the Apennines of about 350 partisans of both Garibaldi and GL formations; this culminated on 23–25 August at Torriglia in an action against the 'free zone' of Bobbio, formed in early July [B-24; B, area K].

In September, three battalions from the 'Monterosa' Div were deployed in the northern Apennines. On 16–23 September the division, along with elements from 232 ID and 31a Brigata Nera, carried out an operation in the Varzi–Bobbio area [B-35], followed on 22–23 September by another around Voghera [B-38], both with uncertain results. The 3rd 'San Marco' Div only began fighting partisans in late August in the Savona area; an operation carried out on 1–5 October along with 34 ID was followed by others in the Langhe and Monferrato areas along with the CARS. From 5 September to 23 December 1944 this division reported 110 anti-partisan operations resulting in 54 partisans killed, 28 wounded, and 188 taken prisoner, for the loss of 27 own killed, 69 wounded and 38 missing.

Between 5 September and 5 October 1944 the Div Decima took part in Operation 'Strassburg' along with I/SS-Pol Rgt 15, Gendarmerie and GNR units, and KGr Noweck from the Waffen-Miliz – the latter organization being renamed on 7 September as Waffen-Grenadier-Brigade der SS (ital Nr 1). The Lanzo and Viù valleys were swept by between 1,600 and 2,600 men, inflicting

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

The sometimes ambiguous approach of the RSI authorities, who announced general amnesties for surrendering partisans on two occasions, was reflected in occasional contacts between the two sides. Here an exchange of prisoners is being discussed between partisans, ENR 'Folgore' Regt paratroopers and German troops in the Cernobbio Valley near Novara on 18 September 1944. In the foreground, a German Feldgendarme carries a Beretta MAB 38 sub-machine gun. (Vitetti)

on the 20th, 42nd & 46th Garibaldi Bdes and GL 4th 'Stellina' Bde losses of 369 killed, 14 wounded and 190 taken prisoner. At an Axis cost of 30 Italians and 2 Germans killed, 113 and 6 wounded, and 32 Italians missing, this operation destroyed the 'free zone' of Lanzo [B-29; B, area E]. The Div Decima was then transferred to the north-east border, and on 28 September–3 October Sich Rgt 38 mopped up the Pellice and Angrogno valleys [B-39].

In the Langhe area, CARS (minus 1a Brig Nera Mobile) continued its operations, culminating on 27 August–9 September in one carried out in conjunction with Sich Rgt 38 [B-26]. In the period 30 July–30 September the two Cacciatori degli Appennini regiments, under Bandenbekämpfungs Stab Heischmann, killed 175 partisans, wounded 96 and took 402 prisoners (plus 701 arrests) at a cost of 4 killed, 48 wounded and 38 missing. At the end of September the first phase of CoGu's activity was at an end, but the partisans' seizure of Alba on 10 October provided proof of its limited success. On 1 October the Cacciatori degli Appennini regiments were moved to the Ceva–Mondovì area, now under command of Korps Lombardia, leaving CoGu with the newly formed units (see below, 'RSI reorganization').

The north-east

In June/July increased partisan activity in the Dolomites and north-east region made the Germans, already facing a threat from Tito's partisans in Slovenia, anxious to secure their lines of communication. Their reaction came on 19 July, when a company from III/SS-Pol Rgt 15 destroyed most of the command group of the 'Osoppo' brigades at Pielungo, killing 42, taking 7 prisoners and arresting 76 [B-4]. On 8–12 August the newly arrived Ost-Btl 263 swept the Vette Feltrine [B-11], followed on 19–21 August by the destruction of villages in the Biois Valley by SS-Hochgebirgs Schule ('SS Alpine School') personnel [B-21].

German reorganization, and raising of new units

By September 1944 a reorganization of German and Fascist security forces was under way. After von Kamptz took over as SSPF Oberitalien-Mitte on 15 August, and Wolff surrendered to the Army the country south of the Po, the areas of competence of both SSPF Oberitalien-West and Mitte were reshaped, and the latter was granted limited reinforcements.

On 1 August Ost-Btl 263 was transferred from the Ravenna area to north of Vicenza to replace Ost-Btl 617; the latter, which had been engaged around Verona in June–July, was now transferred back to Cuneo to join Ost-Btl 406, deployed in the Aosta area since September after its withdrawal from France. Also in September, Georg II/198 Btl and the Lw Sich Rgt arrived in the north-east area. At the same time III & IV Pol Frw Btl 'Italien' were disbanded, and the 1,500 men of I & II Btl were redeployed to the Trieste and Venice areas.

As well as the creation of Polizei Panzer Kompanie 15 equipped with captured Italian tanks, new units were raised in the Operationszone Alpenvorland. On 1 August the SOD was disbanded and replaced by the

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Landwacht ('Territorial Guard') along with three part-time Polizei Reserve Bataillone 'Defregger', while the Trientiner Sicherungs Dienst (TSD) was expanded to three battalions. Following the creation of the Volkssturm national militia in Germany, in November local Standschützen ('Static Defence') units were likewise raised. In November 1944 SSPF Alpenvorland had at his disposal 17,300 men on permanent duty, 18,500 in the Landwacht, plus 5,000 in the 'Defregger' battalions and 7,100 Standschützen.

There was apparently scope to raise yet more units locally. Following the creation of five Polizei Freiwillige Bataillone in the OZAK on 12 August (at Trieste, Gorizia, Udine, Pola and Fiume, totalling 2,100 men in November 1944), on 12 October the creation of Pol Rgts 'Schlanders' and 'Brixen' was ordered. Like Pol Rgt 'Bozen' in May, Pol Rgt 'Alpenvorland' now also took the 'SS' designation.

In September 1944 the total strength of German police troops in Italy (apart from units in the two Operationszone) included some 1,500 men of SS-Pol Rgt 'Bozen' and 1,600 in SS-Pol Rgt 'Alpenvorland'; another 2,531 men in German SS-Polizei units; and some 1,100 in the Gendarmerie. In November there were about 1,250 men in the Rgt 'Bozen', 2,258 in the Rgt 'Alpenvorland', 2,192 in the Rgt 'Schlanders' and 1,335 in the Rgt 'Brixen', with 2,465 in German SS-Police units plus 1,286 in the Gendarmerie.

However, the last levies were to prove disappointing. Employed at first to protect the Voralpenstellung, both 'Alpenvorland' and 'Brixen' suffered from mutinies and desertions when they learned that they might be redeployed to the front line. On 29 January 1945 what was left of SS-Pol Rgt 'Alpenvorland' was used to rebuild SS-Pol Rgt 9, destroyed on the Eastern Front (through in April 1945 a II Btl is listed at Belluno). In February 1945 the two remaining battalions of SS-Pol Rgt 'Brixen' were ordered to rebuild a regiment of 31. SS-Frw Gren Div (SS-Frw Gren Rgt 80) in Hungary.

Moved in October to the Lake Como–Bergamo area, in November the actual strength of the Italian Waffen-Gren Brig der SS was only 4,100, making its upgrading on 10 February 1945 as 29. Waffen-Gren Div der SS (ital Nr 1) a purely paper exercise.

RSI reorganization

In late summer RSI forces were also reorganized, somehow overcoming their crisis. In September the GNR, still some 75,000 strong but now deployed only in cities and towns, had 4 battalions and 32 public order companies plus 40 territorial units. Additionally, it had the fully operational units grouped since early August under the purely administrative 'Etna' Div; these included the battalions under SSPF command (M29, 115, 'Pontida', 'Mazzarini', 'Venezia Giulia', 'Leonessa' and 'Tagliamento'), plus GGR elements serving as Flak auxiliaries which would form two 'Ruggine' battalions at the end of 1944.

At the end of July 1944, 34 Black Brigades were being formed 'on paper', but in a disorganized manner, and with only enough weapons to arm 4,000 *squadristi*. By 20 September only 13,000 men had been armed, forming 36 Brigate Nere in the main cities plus 3 mobile brigades. All were under command of SS-Ogruf Wolff, who in October ordered those positioned south of the Po to withdraw north. In all, 41 plus 5 mobile *brigate* would officially be formed; however, of the 30,000 men mustered by the 39 brigades existing in November, only 16,000 were armed. Given also their lack of organization and discipline, and a tendency to carry out uncontrolled reprisals against civilians, German commanders were quite reluctant to use them in the field.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Milan, July 1944: the GNR's national commander Renato Ricci (centre, wearing peaked field cap), with the SS & Police Leader Upper Italy/West, SS-Brigaf Willy Tensfeld, inspect M13 tanks of the GNR's only armoured unit, the Armoured Group 'Leonessa'. From August this was one of the GNR units that came under Tensfeld's control for anti-partisan operations. (Crociani)

Attempts to militarize the police forces and to create new anti-partisan Army units had only limited success. On 26 July 1944 the police's Legione Autonoma Mobile 'Ettore Muti' formed a third battalion, now having two in Milan and one employed against the partisans in the north-west. In September the Leg 'Muti' was reorganized into 16 companies, 6 of which were operational outside Milan; total strength in October was 1,554 plus 1,153 reserves. In November, Arditi di Polizia ('Police Special Forces') units were also formed in Milan: the Legione Arditi 'Caruso' with two battalions, and the Diavoli Neri ('Black Devils') unit.

F

SUMMER 1944

(1) *Squadrista, 8a Brigata Nera 'Aldo Resega'*, Milan

Hastily formed in summer 1944 from Fascist party members, the Black Brigades were intended to be a distinct force with their own uniform; in fact only black shirts were truly standard, worn with a variety of other items. This man has a black peaked field cap; a jacket cut from Army camouflage material, in this case in 'Sahariana' style; and tropical khaki paratrooper-style trousers bloused directly into Army ankle boots. Both the silver skull-and-dagger cap badge and the small red-enamelled *fasci* just visible on the jacket collars recall early Fascist badges of the 1920s, the former partly borrowed from World War I Arditi units. His sub-machine gun is a 9mm FNAB 43, a rare development of the Beretta MAB 38. Triple canvas magazine-pouch sets were standard at this period. The left arm shield and the breast badge of the Milan brigade bear the name of the local leader of the Fascist party killed by partisans on 8 November 1943.

(1a) Arm shield of the *8a Brigata Nera*.

(2) Partisan, 1st Garibaldi Division '*Divisione Valsesia*', northern Italy

Formed from the 6th, 15th, 81st & 82nd Garibaldi Bdes, the Sesia Valley division was active north of Biella, and between 10 June and 10 July 1944 it created one of the first 'free zones'. This striking-looking young partisan is wearing a captured RSI peaked field cap, an Italian Air Force shirt, and khaki shorts probably adapted from trousers. He sports the red Garibaldi scarf (which was in fact not exclusive to Communist groups), and on his shirt collar the five-sided red patches of his formation. It has been alleged that these were made using German mountain troops' captured Edelweiss badges, but they are evidently smaller than the German type worn on the *Bergmütze* (mountain cap). He carries two Beretta pistols in the type of 'skeleton' holsters commonly made with strapping, and his main weapon is a modified MAB 38 with the wooden stock removed.

(3) *Oberleutnant, Luftwaffen Sicherungs Regiment*, northern Italy

This first lieutenant incorporated into the Luftwaffe's Security Regt wears an enlisted-ranks' blue-grey peaked field cap with a breast-eagle badge attached. The privately acquired waist-length blouse of Italian camouflage material is worn over standard Luftwaffe tropical uniform, with the characteristic baggy trousers. His previous assignment to the flying branch is shown by the golden-yellow underlay to his shoulder boards of rank, and a bulky aircrew wrist-compass. In the few known photos, men from this unit are seen in action carrying only their weapons without any field equipment; this officer has only a triple set of magazine pouches for his 9mm MP40 sub-machine gun, and a holstered 9mm Walther P38 pistol.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

1

1a

3

2

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Formed on 25 July 1944, the ENR's Reparti Anti Partigiani (RAP, 'Anti-Partisan Units') were supposed to enhance the Army's response to the partisan threat, but in August only the 1,400-strong 1st RAP and an artillery battery had been formed. In August–September, I & II Reparti Arditi Ufficiali (RAU) were formed using the surplus of available officers. By November these were followed by three more RAP battalions, but the 1st RAP was disbanded in January 1945. Actual strength was always low – in March 1945, RAP and RAU units totalled only 1,800 men – and, since the personnel were mostly former draft-dodgers and other undesirables, these units were unreliable.

On 10 November 1944 the Cacciatori degli Appennini regiments, reduced to 1,300 men in October, were reorganized into a single three-battalion regiment, still deployed in the Mondovì area.

CRISIS: AUTUMN–WINTER 1944

In mid-September 1944 the partisans' war was, for all practical purposes, at a standstill. The influx of would-be recruits made it impossible for the Allies to arm them all; many of the premature 'free zones' were being retaken by the Germans; true insurgency was still not possible without direct Allied support; and, despite attacks by the US Fifth and British Eighth Armies against the Gothic Line from 12 September, progress would be slow and mainly up the Adriatic flank. Against the advice of Allied liaison officers, the partisan reaction was, inexplicably, to declare more 'free zones'. On 10 September the 'free zone' of Val d'Ossola was created on the Swiss border, followed later in the month by others around Varzi and Tortonese south of Pavia [B, areas N, O & P], and, further west, by those of Monferrato and, on 10 October, Alba [B, areas Q & R). This policy played into the Germans' hands, once again offering defined static targets for their operations.

Partisans from the 'Italia' Bn, 3rd Bde, 1st 'Osoppo' Div, photographed at Monte Pala in October 1944. Seated (right foreground), with camouflage jacket, is the battalion's political commissar Antonio Piccolo. Note the silenced Sten Mk IIS sub-machine gun carried by the man in the foreground. (ANPI)

The north-east

On 5–7 September 1944, large-scale operations began in the north-east with Operation 'Hannover' on the Asiago plateau by Ost-Btl 263 and the Blackshirt 'Tagliamento' Legion with support from the GNR and local Brigate Nere [B-28]. On 12–14 September the nearby Illesi and Chiampo valleys were swept during Operation 'Pauke' ('Kettledrum') by Gend Eins Kdo Bürger, Ost-Btl 263 and Leg 'Tagliamento', which dispersed the local 'Pasubio' Bde [B-33]. On 7–15 September, II/SS-Pol Rgt 'Bozen' and Lw Sich Rgt were on the Cansiglio plateau [B-30] as a prelude to Operation 'Piave'. This was carried out on 19–28 September in the mountainous Grappa area by II/SS-Pol Rgt 'Bozen', elements from Pol Rgt 'Alpenvorland', Lw Sich Rgt, Leg 'Tagliamento', GNR elements and Brigate Nere. This operation 'Piave', which some consider the largest anti-partisan operation conducted in Italy, ended with 385 killed (including 34 SOE members)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

and hundreds of arrests, destroying the 1,000-strong 'Italia Libera' Bde and a Matteotti brigade plus part of a 'Gramsci' brigade [B-36]. The series of operations in the north-east continued on 26–30 September with Operation 'Klagenfurt' north-west of Udine, carried out by III/SS-Pol Rgt 15 and units from the OZAK (including Karstjäger, Cossack and Italian units), which eliminated the 'free zone' of Eastern Friuli [B-37].

In Bologna on 7 November 1944 elements from the 7th GAP Bde (urban partisans of the Gruppi di Azione Patriottica) who were preparing an assault were discovered in their hideouts near the Porta Lame, one of the city gates. Heavy weapons were brought up immediately, taking the partisan positions under fire for hours; the Germans claimed to have inflicted high casualties, but many of the partisans managed to escape. The troops shown around this 20mm Flak 38 look like a mixture from local garrison units. (ANPI)

'Green Week'

Kesselring's reaction to renewed partisan activity was to order on 1 October a Bandenkampfwoche ('bandit-fighting week') codenamed 'Green'. On 8–14 October SSPF Oberitalien-Mitte was to carry out sweeps along the Piave and Tagliamento valleys, and SSPF Oberitalien-West likewise along the Swiss border, while the field-army commands were to clear their own rear areas.

On 30 September–2 October, Pol Rgt 'Alpenvorland' and II/SS-Pol Rgt 'Bozen' had already carried out another operation on the Vette Feltrine; figures are contradictory, but 200–500 partisans were claimed killed and 140–240 taken prisoner [B-42]. On 4–5 October, elements of what was now designated the Waffen-Gren Brig der SS (ital Nr 1) carried out Operation 'Berni' against the 2nd Garibaldi Assault Div in Valsassina, continuing until the end of the month and eventually destroying the 55th Garibaldi Bde, with 130 partisans killed and 500 taken prisoner [B-43]. In the north-east, Lw Sich Rgt opened the dedicated week of operations on 8 October in the Cadore area, clearing it of partisans and inflicting 109 killed, 165 taken prisoner and 262 arrested [B-44]. In nearby Carnia, HSSPF Adriatisches Küstenland carried out Operation 'Waldläufer' ('Forest Runner') with III/SS-Pol Rgt 15 and a Kampfgruppe from SS-Pol Rgt 10; on 10 October this destroyed the local 'free zone' and inflicted heavy losses on the 'Osoppo' brigades [B-44A].

On 8–12 October, Korps Lombardia carried out Operation 'Milano' in the Trebbia Valley with elements from the 'Monterosa' Div [B-45]; but it was AOK 14 that was the most active in the northern Apennines. At Lunigiano on 8–11 October its Fest Brig 135 killed 150 [B-46], and at Sasso Marconi on the 8th they killed 12 and captured 12 from a band of 40 [B-47]. In the Bologna area between 8 and 14 October the SD's Aussenkommando Bologna, with local GNR and 23a Brigata Nera, killed 20 and arrested 35 in the Idice Valley on the 9th [B-49], and executed 29 at Castelmaggiore on the 14th [B-48]. Operations were carried out on 9–10 October at Monte Cervo, with 76 killed and 1,131 arrested [B-50], and at Sesto Imolese, where 269 were arrested, 2 of whom were executed [B-51]. On the 14th, 500 were arrested in Bologna itself [B-54], while on the same day an AOK 10 operation north of Ferrara reported 7 partisans killed and 60 taken prisoner [B-55].

The peak of this phase was reached in two separate operations. On 17 October troops from AOK 14 killed 11 (including 3 SOE officers) and took 20 prisoners at Bosco di Corniglio, wiping out the Parma partisan command [B-56]; and on 9–19 October the Waffen-Gren Brig der SS carried out

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

A middle-aged *squadrista* belonging to an unidentified Black Brigade questions village women during an anti-partisan sweep. He wears a German field cap with an Italian skull badge, and is armed with a 9mm TZ 45 sub-machine gun. (Vitetti)

Operation 'Avanti' in the Val d'Ossola along with elements of SS-Pol Rgt 15, GNR battalions M29, 115, 'Venezia Giulia' and 'Leonessa', the 'Folgore' Para Bn and 6a Brigata Nera. This force of about 3,000 eventually destroyed the 'free zone' of Ossola; some 5,000 partisans attempted a positional defence before disbanding and seeking refuge over the Swiss border, losing 565 killed and 387 taken prisoner [B-52]. Operations by Sich Rgt 38 north-west of Turin on 13–15 October [B-53] concluded 'Green Week' against partisans in the north-west; German claims vary from 2,341 to 3,633 partisans killed anything from 2,503 to 8,241 captured, and 1,949 (plus 10,300 draft-dodgers) arrested.

Operations continued well after the end of the designated week. In the north-west on 20–23 October, and again on 1–10 November, Sich Rgt 38 carried out Operation 'Michael' with Ost-Btl 617 in the Soana Valley [B-58]; meanwhile on 2 November, RAP units supported by Div Decima, GNR and 1a Brigata Nera Mobile retook Alba and ended its short-lived 'free zone' [B-59]. On 11 and again on 15–18 November, Sich Rgt 38 with Ost-Btl 617 was active west and north-west of Turin with Operations 'Holland' and 'Herbstzeitlose' ('Eternal Autumn'), before eventually leaving the area to LXXV AK [B-60 & 61]. In the northern Apennines on 17 November the Lehrstab für Bandenbekämpfung mopped up the area of Vetto d'Enza, killing 18 and taking 6 prisoners including a commander and a political commissar [B-62]. On 19–26 November, Operation 'Regenwetter' ('Stormy Weather') in the Bosco di Corniglio area saw the Lehrstab in action again along with MG Btl Kesselring, Lehr-Btl Geb Jäg Schule 'Mittenwald', and units from LI Geb AK; the result was 67 killed and 42 taken prisoner [B-63]. A minor operation on 20–21 October at Budrio north-east of Bologna by LI Geb AK reported 10 killed and 193 arrested (of whom 8 were later executed) [B-57]. The major operation of this period was carried out on 23 November–9 December in the area south of the Po below Pavia. Operation 'Heygendorff', carried out by elements of 162 (Turk) ID with support from Italian units including RAP, eliminated the 'free zone' of Varzi [B-64; B, area O].

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Soldiers of the Cacciatori degli Appennini resting during an operation in winter 1944. They are equipped with a mixture of both German and Italian winter parkas, and many wear the distinctive cavalry-style bandolier pouches – see Plate H1. (Vitetti)

'White Week'

On 27 November–2 December 1944 another Bandenkampfwoche was carried out, known this time as 'White Week'. Armee Oberkommando 14 was active in the northern Apennines. Operation 'Catilina' at Sarzana, by elements from 148 ID, killed 365 and took 20 prisoners [B-65], and in the Apuania area the Lehrstab für Bandenbekämpfung killed 110 and captured 9 [B-68]. Further north, LI Geb AK carried out sweeps in the area Reggio Emilia–Modena with support from local Brigate Nere and GNR, which killed either 33 or 61 and captured 108 or 335 [B-66]. On 19 December, Reggio Emilia's GNR command would carry out a reprisal at Villa Sesso where 71 were arrested, of whom 14 were executed [B-73]. On 27 November, 230 partisans from the 7th GAP Bde were preparing to strike in the centre of Bologna when they were discovered and came under heavy fire; this 'battle of the Porta Lame' eventually ended with claims of 100 partisans killed and 200 taken prisoner, which seem exaggerated [B-69].

In the north-east, during 'White Week' Ost-Btl 263 carried out Operations 'Aachen I–III' and 'München' north of Vicenza under command of SSPF Oberitalien-Mitte [B-67], before being relieved by 2a Brigata Nera Mobile and moved to the Verona area. To the west, AOK 14's Operation 'Lindenblume' ('Linden Flower') south-east of Pavia concluded with 391 killed, 179 taken prisoner [B-70], and also the destruction of the Tortonese 'free zone' [B, area P], one of the last remaining. All in all, however, 'White Week' was less successful than 'Green', with claims for 1,021 killed, 1,776 taken prisoner, and 2,385 (plus 217 draft-dodgers) arrested.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

The 'Maiella' partisan group proudly showing off two captured German MG42 machine guns. This group would link up with the British Eighth Army when the advancing front line on the Adriatic front reached them; eventually incorporated as a regular unit within II Polish Corps, it reached a strength of about 1,000 men. (Cappellano)

A group of partisans, including women, wave to a Douglas C-47 'Skytrain' transport while collecting parachuted supplies. Low-level daylight airdrops like this were only possible during the very last stage of the war; until then enemy surveillance meant that only night drops from high altitudes had a reasonable chance of remaining undetected. After a disastrous collapse of deliveries during autumn 1944, the rate of requests fulfilled recovered impressively in December; the peak would be achieved in April 1945, when deliveries represented 198 per cent of the requests made. (Vitetti)

Operations in the north-west were more limited, and it was 14 December before Sich Rgt 38 with Ost-Btl 617 was back in action in Operation 'Fidelio' north of Turin [B-71]. Between 2 and 23 December, KGr Drescher (I/SS-Pol Rgt 15 with Flak, 162 ID, GNR and Brigate Nere support) carried out Operation 'Koblenz-Süd' against Monferrato, which cleared this last 'free zone' and inflicted 162 killed and 1,628 captured [B-74]. Between 21 November and 20 December, Korps Lombardia claimed in total 1,034 partisans killed, 172 wounded and 955 taken prisoner.

The collapse of partisan morale

By the time of the second 'bandit-fighting week' the partisan movement was already facing a crisis. The 'free zones' had been an utter failure, and morale was also damaged by shortages of Allied air supplies (in August–September only about 30 per cent of requests had been fulfilled; in October just 10 per cent). Consequently, a renewed RSI amnesty offer on 28 October was very successful: no fewer than 47,000 handed themselves in, while partisan activity collapsed. Field Marshal Alexander's radio message of 13 November, suggesting that the partisans prepare to sit out the winter, hardly raised the spirits of those who remained. In November 1944 the GNR reported only 975 incidents, dropping to 807 in December and 636 in January 1945, though ENR figures for February (722) and the first half of March (475) did show some recovery.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Some partisan actions in the front lines in cooperation with Allied units were more successful. On 25 September some 400 partisans from the 36th Garibaldi Bde supported the US 88th Inf Div in its seizure of Monte Battaglia; and on 4 December the 28th Garibaldi Bde of Arrigo Boldrini ('Bülow') linked up with the British No.1 Demolition Sqn led by Maj Vladimir Peniakoff ('Popski's Private Army') to lead the British Eighth Army into Ravenna. The Allied advance now ground to a halt; since 27 October the US Fifth Army had been stuck in the mountains well south of Bologna, and on 29 December the British Eighth Army halted on the Senio river, on a line slanting down south-west from south of Lake Comacchio.

RECOVERY: SPRING 1945

During winter 1944–45 the number of active partisans declined to a hard core of some 20,000–30,000, but the enforced pause was used to reorganize.

The remaining groups focused their activity in the north-west (Turin, Asti), on the Ligurian coast, and in the Bologna area. Allied liaison missions and airdrops increased; by April 1945 there were 30 SOE missions active in northern Italy, mostly in the north-west. In November 1944, 377 tons of supplies were dropped, followed by 594 in December, 364 in January 1945, 951 in February, 925 in March, and 1,099 in April. By then, partisan activity had already revived throughout the north-west, the northern Apennines and the Po Valley. The numbers of partisans had increased rapidly, though with a more selective recruitment: from 80,000 in March to 130,000 in April, of whom 70,000 were armed. The latter were mostly deployed in Piedmont (30,000), Lombardy (9,000), Liguria (7,000), Veneto (12,000) and Emilia (12,000), and two-thirds of them – some 51,000 – belonged to the Garibaldi formations.

Partisans parading in Milan immediately after its liberation on 26 April 1945; it is not known why they wear their *'Alpino'* hats back to front. The man on the left is armed with an early-model Beretta MAB 38, the one on the right with a TZ 45 sub-machine gun. (Cappellano)

Anti-partisan operations continued into early 1945. In the northern Apennines on 19–23 December, elements of 148 and 162 (Turk) ID carried out Operation 'Strassburg' near Genoa [B-72], followed on 31 December 1944–1 January 1945 by 162 (Turk) ID's Operation 'Lemberg' at Monte Maggiorasca [B-75]. Supported by Italian units, they struck again on 6–15 January at Borgo Val di Taro in Operation 'Totila' against the 31st, 32nd and 135th Garibaldi Bdes [B-78]. In the rear areas, Lehrstab für Bandenbekämpfung was back in action on 6–19 January at Piandelagotti [B-77] with Operation 'Wettersturz' ('Weatherfall'). In the Alps, Sich Rgt 38 carried out Op 'Apfelkern' ('Apple Pip') on 3–5 January south of Turin with Ost-Btl 617 [B-76], and Operation 'Paukenschlag' ('Kettledrum Hit') in the Aosta Valley on 3 February with Ost-Btl 617 and 406 [B-80]. On 13–30 January the last major operation was carried out in the Sesia Valley by elements of the Waffen-Gren Brig der SS, SS-Pol Rgt 15 & 20, the GNR's 115, 'Venezia Giulia' and

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

29 April 1945: a group of partisan leaders photographed with their SOE liaison officer in the streets of liberated Cuneo. From left: Pietro Comollo; the South African Capt Hugh Ballard, who had parachuted in on 18 November 1944; Ettore Rosa, and Faustino Dalmazzo. In total, SOE inserted 96 missions into Italy, with 119 British and 163 Italian personnel. (ANPI)

'Pontida' Bns plus elements of Leg 'Muti'. Among other results, this Operation 'Hochland' ('Highland') captured Maj Alastair MacDonald, leader of the SOE 'Cherokee' mission [B-79].

G

AUTUMN 1944

(1) *Unterwachtmeister, Trientiner Sicherungs Verband*, Trento

Amongst police and security forces raised by German conscription in the Operationszone Alpenvorland, the TSV ('Trento Security Unit') was unusual in being raised in an almost entirely ethnically Italian area. The field-grey field cap bears German Police insignia; unlike the Südtiroler Ordnungs Dienst (SOD, 'South Tyrol Order Service'), the men of the TSV usually wore standard Ordnungspolizei uniforms but with their own badge on the left sleeve. A peculiarity was the black ski-type trousers worn for barracks duty, as by this sentry, who is using his German *Zeltbahn* (shelter-half) for protection against the weather. Some men were issued the Luftschütz (Air Defence Service) belt buckle; Italian cartridge pouches were standard, and note the single neck-strap supporting them. The obscured weapon is a 6.5mm Carcano M91TS carbine, with its knife bayonet frogged to the belt on the left hip.

(1a) Left sleeve badge, bearing the eagle symbol of the Trento region.

(2) *Vicebrigadiere, Legione Arditi di Polizia 'Caruso'*, Milan

This RSI police unit was meant to be a 'special force', hence the boastful borrowing of the term 'Arditi'; located in Milan, it was active against partisans in the surrounding area. It was named after Rome's chief of police, who was subsequently tried and executed for his involvement in reprisals after the Via Rasella ambush. This senior NCO wears standard police grey uniform, the jacket cut in the familiar 'Sahariana' style with a caped chest incorporating the pocket flaps. The odd-looking cap bears a large yellow-metal badge of an eagle and *fascio*, and a cord of red/black twist. Instead of the normal rectangular red police collar patches this unit wore red-and-black 'flames', but with the same yellow-metal wreathed *fascio* badge. A gold eagle-and-*fascio* badge surmounted by 'RP', on dark red backing, is worn on the right breast. A red/black cord lanyard passes separately around the left shoulder strap and shoulder, looping up to the left breast-pocket button and terminating in red and black tassels. The chevrons of this rank, in light grey and silver, are worn on both sleeves; above them on the left arm is a gold and silver wreathed *gladius* badge on a dark red oval, resembling the Arditi design but with the word 'POLIZIA' instead of 'ITALIA' on the sword guard.

(3) British Liaison Officer, SOE, northern Italy

Unlike Special Operations Executive agents in northern Europe, the BLOs who were dropped into Italy and the Balkans wore battledress uniform, though this agent's blouse would display no insignia. With the issue wool pullover he wears an officer's collar-attached shirt and brown boots, and standard 37 Pattern web belt and anklets. His sub-machine gun is a 9mm Sten Mk IIS with silencer; this modification, firing only on semi-automatic, made no sound louder than the mechanical movement of the bolt. A photo shows magazines carried in a makeshift fabric pouch rig worn on the chest. Behind him lies a British CLE Mk III 'bombcell' airdrop container for weapons and supplies. Although they were intended primarily to liaise with and train partisans, SOE missions often became directly involved in the fighting against German and RSI troops, and numbers of them were killed or captured.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

1a

2

1

3

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

In late April 1945 partisans from the 7th 'Monferrato' Div enter Turin aboard an Italian 75mm self-propelled gun probably captured from the ENR's 'Leonessa' armoured group. Although they belong to what was ostensibly a politically independent formation, they have prudently painted 'W (Viva) Stalin' on the front glacis plate above the division's name. (Vitetti)

The German collapse in northern Italy

In February and March 1945 the German attitude changed: in the face of the obvious partisan recovery, there were attempts to negotiate agreements in order to clear the way for the unavoidable German retreat. The start of the British Eighth Army's offensive in the north-east with Operation 'Grapeshot' on 9 April soon led to a German collapse; three days later the front had been breached, and on 14 April the US Fifth Army started its own offensive further west. This led on 20 April to the final breakthrough that compelled the German C-in-C, GenObst von Vietinghoff, to order a withdrawal to the Voralpenstellung. Four days later Allied forces crossed the River Po.

Partisan groups prevented a major retreat in the north-west, and on 25 April the CLNAI gave the order for general insurrection. The partisans immediately headed for the cities; Genoa and Milan were in their hands on 26 April, followed on the 27th by Turin, and on the 28th by most of Venice. On 28 April partisans executed the fleeing Mussolini, while Allied troops were advancing at full speed in northern Italy. On 29 April, German representatives signed the surrender of all troops in the country; its implementation on 2 May 1945 officially put an end to the Italian campaign, and to partisan warfare (though not to local violence, as many scores were mercilessly settled).

SUMMARY: THE PARTISANS

Character and leadership

In September 1943 early partisan groups enjoyed many potential advantages, but these soon disappeared. Intensely cultivated mountainous terrain provided ideal refuges, and the road network enabled fast movements. Local

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Captain Cosa (standing right of centre, wearing an *'Alpino'* hat) with men of the 'Val Pesio' group in Piedmont, January 1944. Cosa and one other partisan have a couple of the first Sten sub-machine guns to be parachuted in by the British. (ANPI)

leaders emerged naturally through force of character; small groups could easily obtain food from the rural population, and the surrender of the armed forces offered opportunities to acquire weapons from local depots and isolated garrisons. The RSI's delay in creating security forces, as well as an initially patchy German reaction, gave the partisans a breathing space in winter 1943–44, and the widespread reluctance to comply with the Fascist call to arms brought many draft-dodgers to swell their ranks. However, the rapid expansion of partisan formations in spring–summer 1944, leading to the premature creation of 'brigades' up to 1,000 strong and even of nominal 'divisions', soon brought many underlying problems to the surface.

Most of those filling the new partisans' ranks were aged 19 to 24, and in general partisans belonged to the age groups between 17 and 35, with only some 13 per cent of older men. Many of the youngest lacked any military training, and many were individualistic and resentful of discipline and hierarchy, which made for difficulties of command. Early leaders, while charismatic, sometimes proved unequal to the task of commanding larger formations, and groups might switch to other formations in search of alternative leadership. The creation of 'pyramid'-style organizations – from a nucleus of half-a-dozen men, via squads of up to a dozen, detachments of up to 50, and brigades of several hundred – was no replacement for an army-style chain of command. There was little communication between groups, which anyway sought to maintain their independence.

Lack of skilled and experienced commanders created problems not only with command and control of formations, but also with the necessary training of new recruits. The 'political commissars', first introduced in the Communist Garibaldi units but later to become more widespread, were meant to support the commander, but all too often they acted as political propagandists who might compete against his authority. The calibre of the

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

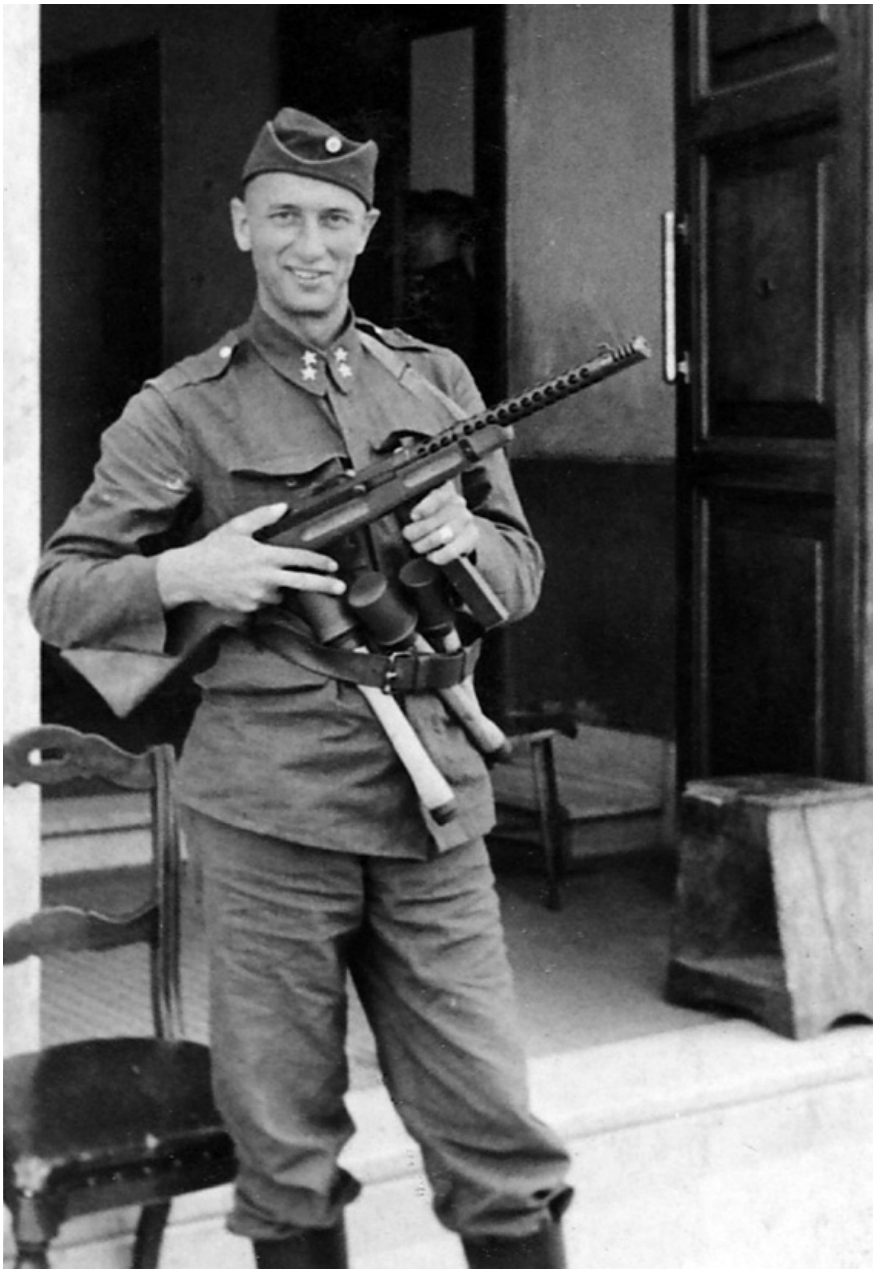
These partisans at rest are cleaning their weapons, which include Sten and MAB 38 sub-machine guns and a Bren light machine gun. Scarcity of ammunition, particularly in Allied calibres such as .45in and .303in whose resupply was unpredictable, usually prevented groups from carrying out enough live-firing training to become really proficient. (Vitetti)

personnel also varied widely. Only about 3,000 seasoned veterans, returned from the Spanish Civil War or French Resistance, were available, so, unsurprisingly, it soon became clear that ex-soldiers were needed if partisan formations were to achieve and maintain reasonable levels of effectiveness. However, the Italian Army was inexperienced in guerrilla warfare, and sometimes even ex-soldiers proved unequal to fighting the anti-partisan forces – particularly German units. Nevertheless, out of the 1,673 leaders of the Garibaldi brigades only some 10 per cent would emerge from the partisan warfare of 1943–45, the rest being either ex-military or veterans of Spain and France.

Equipment and communications

For most partisan formations the limited availability of weapons and ammunition hampered the development of real fighting power, at least before spring 1945. While some German equipment was acquired after successful raids, the weapons available were mostly Italian, taken from depots or from the various garrisons and outposts attacked. The most widely used were the standard 9mm Beretta 34 pistol and 6.5mm Carcano 91 rifle or carbine; OTO and SRCM hand grenades were effective at close range, while other explosives used were mostly from civil engineering sources. The beginning of Allied air supplies would bring much-appreciated British Sten sub-machine guns; airdrops also included quantities of other SMGs, Bren light machine guns, light and medium mortars, and even anti-tank weapons such as PIATs and bazookas. Latterly these Allied airdrops made good the shortages of weapons and ammunition, as well as providing much-needed uniforms and medical equipment.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com



A corporal *(desiatnik)* from one of the Czech battalions deployed in Italy by the Germans from May 1944 poses after having deserted to join a partisan group. Many ex-POWs (particularly Yugoslavs), and deserters from the variety of foreign units under German and RSI command, were welcomed for their military experience. One escaped British officer, Maj Anthony Oldham, even took command of the 'Lunese' Garibaldi Division. By September 1944 nearly 700 of these Czechs had deserted, some to join insurgent groups, others to make for France, where the Czechoslovak Independent Armd Bde was serving under Canadian First Army. In the closing weeks of the war elements of the Germans' Slovakian Technical Bde also joined the Italian resistance. (ANPI)

Communications were a major problem. Given their lack of radio equipment, groups had to use despatch riders on a large scale, and this problem became worse following the growth in strength and number of partisan formations. This lack of reliable communications contributed to the dangerous rigidity of the partisans' defence of their refuges. It is apparent that procuring enough food locally for enlarged groups was also a persistent problem. The difficulty of providing care for their wounded and sick (whose numbers increased in summer 1944 as a consequence of the partisan groups' swelling ranks, and of vigorous German countermeasures) underlined in the most painful way the lesson that their logistic weakness made over-large formations ineffective. The creation of partisan 'sanctuaries' (areas where

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Listening to BBC radio broadcasts for the coded messages that might confirm a forthcoming airdrop or pass other vital information and instructions. While the SOE and OSS missions brought contact with the outside world from spring 1944 onwards, communications between the separate groups had always been a major problem for the partisans; they usually had no option but to rely upon 'despatch riders' to carry messages, at great risk to their lives. (ANPI)

they could seek refuge and from where they could strike at will), and eventually of the 'free zones', were clearly attempts to solve these problems, but they were hardly successful to any notable degree.

Tactics and results

Partisan tactics and the results achieved were greatly influenced by all these factors. The creation of 'sanctuaries' and of the oversized formations of spring–summer 1944 encouraged a static approach rather than the flexible, highly mobile tactics required for guerrilla warfare. Differences between partisan formations would emerge as they faced the German reactions. For example, in March 1944 the former Alpini officer Maj Enrico Martini 'Mauri', commander of the independent formations operating in the Cuneo area, opted for a static defence when facing I/SS-Pol Rgt 15; he deployed his men in a series of outposts, and suffered heavy losses as a consequence. The Garibaldi and GL formations in the nearby Val Maira, facing Operation 'Wien' later in the same month, also suffered heavily, but contained their losses by fragmenting into small groups that escaped from the German encirclement [A-21].

The creation of 'free zones' brought the need to provide civilian administration, adding a further burden that distracted partisan commanders from their proper military tasks. The static defence of large areas weakened partisan formations unsuited for such tactics; inadequate defensive positions, weaknesses in surveillance, and lack of tactical flexibility against the inevitable German reaction doomed the 'free zones' to destruction. Furthermore, the subsequent creation of yet another series of these was attempted despite the fact that none of the reasons for the previous defeats had been addressed.

Political suspicions between different formations were another handicap for the partisan movement; they hardly supported one another, and

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

In the dying weeks of the war Allied soldiers were occasionally available to use heavy weapons in support of partisan operations. This well-known photo shows a British Vickers medium machine gun crew from 2nd SAS Regt, photographed outside Castino village during Operation 'Canuck' against Alba in April 1945. The three troopers have been named by veterans as 'Chick' Fowler, Jack Mouser and Ted 'Scrog' Gargan. (Vitetti; IWM NA 25407, photo by Sgt C.J. Dawson, No 2 AFPU)

coordination was almost entirely absent. In the north-east, the GL 'Osoppo' and Garibaldi 'Natisone' brigades carried out their attacks against enemy communications and garrisons, and reacted to German operations, entirely independently of one another. British liaison officers' evaluations offer some insight; Maj Harold Tilman remarked that partisans were more than willing to fight, but that all too often they stubbornly defended their positions rather than fleeing the area. The BLOs reported that lack of training led the partisans to fire at everything, at too long a range, thus wasting their already scarce ammunition. They also noted that a lack of discipline exacerbated the poor qualities of leaders who in many cases were civilians appointed for political reasons. Overall, the BLOs rated some 10 per cent of the partisans as quite good, with another 30 per cent lacking experience and training and therefore mostly useful in support. The remainder, often mere draft-dodgers, lacked not only training and experience but in many cases even a willingness to fight.

The strategic situation and the severe reduction in Allied airdrops in summer–autumn 1944 made all these problems worse. In June–July, 86 per cent of requests were fulfilled, but this fell to 30 and 34 per cent respectively in August and September, and to a mere 10 per cent in October 1944. After having met 38 per cent of requests in November, the Allies managed an impressive 108 per cent in December; but during the months of crisis the BLOs therefore had to select the most promising and aggressive groups to receive support, which naturally created resentment among the others. It was not until the reorganization of early 1945, with more careful recruitment and generous flows of Allied supplies, that the great majority of partisan formations were really capable of fighting the Germans in the open – which is precisely what the premature strategy of 'free zones' had hoped to achieve.

It is easy to argue that the Italian partisans failed to match their capabilities to their military aims, but there is no doubt that their political goals were eventually achieved. Before the arrival of Allied liaison teams most of their

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

targets for attack and sabotage were chosen on the simple grounds of opportunity rather than military value. While it is hard to assess their actual influence on the German forces in Italy, available data may throw some light on their efforts.

Statistics from the Bev Gen records show that between mid-October 1943 and mid-May 1944, sabotage and attacks against communications (telephone and telegraph lines) and railway lines constituted between 27 and 33 per cent of partisan activity. Meanwhile, attacks against German and (mostly) Italian outposts rose from 21.5 per cent of total activity in October–November 1943 to 36.5 per cent in January–February 1944. Looting rose in January–February 1944 to 33.6 per cent of all incidents, and in the following months to 38 per cent – a clear sign of the swelling of partisan ranks. Statistics from the AGr/AA von Zangen show a similar situation: between 1 February and 4 July 1944, sabotage and attacks against railway lines represented on average 30 per cent of incidents; against communications, 18 per cent; and other sabotage to roads, bridges and vehicles, 5 per cent. Attacks against German soldiers steadily increased in April 1944, rising to 29 per cent of incidents in June–July.

The ENR statistics show that sabotage decreased from peaks in June and July of 35 and 52.5 per cent of incidents, respectively, to an average of 24 per cent in the following months. According to Italian statistics, from summer 1944 partisan activity started to focus on attacks against German and Italian soldiers, these rising from 18.6 per cent of incidents in June to 38.4 per cent in October. Looting likewise decreased steadily from 52.3 per cent of incidents in June 1944 to 25.3 per cent in March 1945 – clearly the result of increased Allied air supplies. The summer of 1944 thus represented a turning-point in partisan activity, after which sabotage and attacks against communications decreased in favour of first looting and then attacks against Axis troops, both being necessary to obtain food and weapons to enable large formations to carry on their war.

Losses on both sides

Some notes on losses may reveal failures in the tactics and strategies adopted. Between 15 October 1943 and 15 June 1944, Bev Gen reported a total of 226 German soldiers killed, 302 wounded and 38 abducted by partisans. Between 24 January and 4 July 1944, AGr/AA von Zangen reported 410 German soldiers killed (189 in anti-partisan operations, 221 by partisan activity), 1,082 wounded (respectively 593, and 489), and 193 missing (100, and 93), for a grand total of 636 German soldiers killed, 1,384 wounded and 231 abducted or missing.

These figures are certainly conservative, but they do correspond closely with overall losses due to partisan warfare. Up to 10 June 1944, total German losses in Italy amounted to 25,100 killed (268 in AGr/AA von Zangen, 171 in HGr C, all others in the front-line AOK 10 and 14); 93,113 wounded (of which 748 in AGr/AA von Zangen, 583 in HGr C); and no fewer than 140,367 missing (of which 102 in AGr/AA von Zangen, 69 in HGr C, so the vast majority in the front lines). Heeresgruppe C's reports for the period 14 June 1944–25 February 1945 add, specifically due to partisan warfare, another 1,439 killed, 2,542 wounded, and 2,068 abducted or missing. Therefore, *total German losses due to partisan warfare from October 1943 to February 1945* were probably approximately as follows: 2,075 killed by partisans (out of deaths from all causes to 31 January 1945 of 44,825); 3,926

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

wounded (from an overall 161,499); and 2,299 abducted or missing (from a total of 412,172).

Losses to the smaller Italian RSI forces were for that reason proportionately heavier. Esercito Nazionale Repubblicano casualties to 31 March 1945 were 1,977 killed, 1,235 wounded, and 606 missing. That these losses were mostly suffered during anti-partisan operations is suggested by a comparison with losses specifically to the partisans up to September 1944: 1,564 killed, 616 wounded, and 503 missing. The GNR reported, up to January 1945, maximum losses of 2,419 killed (plus 344 in the OZAK) and 3,269 wounded (plus 438 in the OZAK), again mostly due to partisan warfare. The casualties reported by the Brigate Nere up to January 1945 were 740 killed and 1,070 wounded, and these figures would have increased in the following four months.

On the other side of the ledger, from 1 December 1943 to 25 February 1945 the Germans claimed a total of 30,209 partisans killed, 22,028 taken prisoner, plus 34,860 civilians arrested (these figures probably include the OZAV). The Italian postwar figures were 28,368 partisans killed and 20,726 wounded, plus 14,150 civilians killed.

SUMMARY: THE GERMAN REACTION

Intelligence

The methods adopted in Italy had been shaped by years of experience in anti-partisan warfare in Poland, the USSR, Yugoslavia, France and elsewhere, and they would prove again both their effectiveness and their shortcomings.

Adequate intelligence was the key to this kind of warfare. In field-unit HQs the Ic (G-2) officers gathered information on the partisans as well as on the Allied forces. Geheime Feldpolizei ('Secret Field Police') units were attached to the higher commands (HGr C had Gruppe GFP 637; AOK 10,

During a sweep in the northern Apennines in spring 1944, men from the 'Hermann Göring' Div confer with a GNR captain, who still retains his old Blackshirts badges on his field cap and the pocket flap of his *'Sahariana'.* Few GNR units were of impressive quality, but they provided much-needed local numbers to support German operations. (ANPI)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Gruppe 741; AOK 14, Gruppe 610; and AOK Lombardia, Gruppe 751). The Bev Gen staff included Abwehrstelle Italien, the Italian branch of the Wehrmacht intelligence service (Abwehr). The network under SS-Ogruf Wolff's control also played a crucial role; SS-Gruf Harster's BdS was largely involved in anti-partisan warfare, and, even though its members occasionally operated in the field, it was mostly active in the cities and concerned with intelligence-gathering.

German-occupied Italy had only one city of more than a million inhabitants – Rome – but other centres such as Turin, Milan, Genoa, Florence and Bologna were also crucial hubs for communications and supplies. Control of the cities was of foremost importance, and the BdS organization evolved from its early network of Aussenkommandos to a more thorough one including new AK at Forlì, Macerata and Parma, and smaller Aussenposten in towns such as Bergamo, Asti, Imperia, La Spezia, Savona, Aosta and Padua. Anti-partisan work saw the peak of cooperation between different SS branches, with the BdS's SS-HStuf Adolf Wiessner taking over the role of Ic officer on Wolff's Stab für Bandenbekämpfung, formed in spring 1944 under command of Wolff's chief of staff, SS-Oberf Harro With.

Cooperation with the Italian police was essential, and, even though Mussolini's political police was not rebuilt after his first downfall on 25 July 1943, the Polizia Repubblicana's political branches in the various *questure* (police HQs in the main cities) collaborated actively. An Ispettorato Speciale Polizia Antipartigiana ('Special Anti-Partisan Police Inspectorate') was also active between August and December 1944. In the main cities the GNR formed its own Uffici Politici Investigativi (UPI, 'Political Investigation Offices'), as did the Brigate Nere in summer 1944; basically, every unit or organization (such as the Legione 'Ettore Muti') had its own, with the result that by autumn 1944 more than a dozen different German and Italian police agencies were active in Milan. This multiplication must seem counter-productive, but successes were achieved nonetheless: e.g. the arrest on 25 January 1944 of Col Giuseppe Lanza di Montezemolo, leader of the Fronte Militare di Liberazione ('Military Liberation Front') in Rome, and the dismantling of the SOE-led 'Otto' organization in Liguria in March 1944.

Territorial control

The weak spot in German organization was control of the territory. Officially this was left in the hands of the RSI's police and security forces, but, given their inadequacy, a German back-up organization was created.

The vast networks of HQs, garrisons and outposts, of supply, communications, artillery, rear-area units and services and the Luftwaffe ground organization were ordered in March 1944 to form an anti-partisan organization. This was to be based on the breakdown of different areas into Bandenabschnitte ('bandit sectors'), subsequently Sicherungsabschnitte ('security sectors'). Each had a Wehrmacht or Police officer in charge, tasked with providing prompt reaction against partisan attacks and sabotage. This reaction was the mission of the purpose-formed Alarmeinheiten ('alarm units'), with a strength varying from platoon to company. There were three different kinds of these sub-units: for prompt reaction and short-term employment; for temporary use; and for constant employment in anti-partisan warfare. In Italy at least three complete Alarmbataillone were formed (Al Btl 508, Al Btl Schindler by the 'HG' Div, and Al Btl Wehrmann by 3 Pz Gren Div), and the 'HG' Div formed five permanent Alarmkompanien

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

in 1943–44. The 'reactive' Alarmeinheiten also played their parts in 'active' operations in support of field units; examples are Operation 'Wien' [A-21], with Alarmeinheiten from MK 1020 Cuneo; Operation 'Oberst Schanze' [A-23], with Alarmeinheiten from Rieti; and the 15 April 1944 operation near Parma [A-32], carried out by Alarmeinheiten from MK 1008 Parma along with a GNR platoon and a Luftwaffe Jagdkommando.

Jagdkommandos ('hunting commandos'; aka Bandenjagdkommandos, 'bandit-hunting commandos') represented the active rather than the reactive side of anti-partisan warfare. They were formed from selected elements, generally from reconnaissance units, again with a strength varying from platoon to company. They were meant to fight partisans by turning their own methods against them: moving by night, hiding, shifting quickly from place to place, gathering information, then fighting partisans by means of 'hit-and-run' tactics. By March 1944, Luftflotte 2 had formed five Eingreifengruppe ('reaction groups', equivalent to Alarmeinheiten), often equipped with light and heavy anti-aircraft guns, and 30 Jagdkommandos. Already in 1943 a Banden-Jagdkompanie had been formed by HGr C HQ, while variously sized Kommandos (like 362 ID's 'Bandenjagdzug' platoon) were formed by field units including the Italian ENR divisions, and also by the German SD (Bandenjagdkommando BdS Italien took part in operations such as 'Wien').

Tactics and results

Even though the Germans managed to collect adequate intelligence on Italian partisans, and had at their disposal an array of forces, the actual destruction of partisan groups in the field proved problematic. German tactics envisaged small- or medium-scale sweeps aimed at surrounding and eventually destroying partisan groups. Command and control was the key to these operations, with different units cooperating closely and maintaining intercommunication while moving fast, to achieve a high level of flexibility. The goal was to take partisan groups by surprise, surround them by blocking potential escape routes, then destroy them by means of a concentric mopping-up helped by support weapons (including, where available, aircraft). In many cases, however, the terrain made concentric mopping-up from all sides impossible, and a 'blocking line' had to be used instead, pushing the partisans against it until their destruction was assured. In practice the differing quality and nature of the units involved in operations often prevented this. Fast-moving, well-equipped units might drive partisans up to the 'blocking line', but in many instances stop-lines manned by Alarmeinheiten or Italian units failed in their purpose, enabling small groups of partisans to escape.

Partisans being searched after capture by German troops in the Apennines. Their fate is sealed; they will almost certainly be executed after the most perfunctory trial. (Vitetti)

While they sometimes inflicted heavy losses and put a temporary stop to local activity, it is clear that German anti-partisan operations were only partly successful. Often the partisans were only forced to disperse in small groups, which

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Prisoners captured at Bassano del Grappa on 26 September 1944 during Operation 'Piave' face a brief trial by military tribunal. This massive operation by SS-Police, Luftwaffe and Italian Fascist units killed 385 partisans and 34 SOE agents, and destroyed two-and-a-half partisan brigades. (ANPI)

moved somewhere else and got back into action sooner or later. The collapse of the partisan 'free zones' in autumn–winter 1944 suggests that in the long run the German tactics adopted in the autumn – the massing of large forces spearheaded by front-line combat units – might have been successful, but for Germany there was no 'long run'. Strategically, time was on the Allies' side, and increased supplies and improved partisan organization in winter/spring 1944–45 tipped the balance.

While the Italian partisans were often seen as a genuine threat in the rear areas, in spite of this they never really succeeded in blocking the German lines

H WINTER/SPRING 1944–45

(1) *Soldato, I Battaglione, Raggruppamento 'Cacciatori degli Appennini'*

The only force specifically formed for anti-partisan warfare by the RSI's Army was named after a unit created by Giuseppe Garibaldi during Italy's wars of independence. Uniforms and equipment were mainly standard Italian issue, but German reversible white/dark grey winter parkas and (not shown here) padded trousers were also provided. The Italian M33 helmet is smeared with mud for camouflage. The only visible insignia is the metal shield of this formation, which some photos show sewn to the left sleeve of the parka. The bandolier equipment, with two flaps covering four ammunition pouches slung across the chest, is of the pattern issued to Italian mounted and motorized troops. His weapon is the standard 6.5mm Carcano 91 carbine.

(1a) The metal sleeve shield of the Cacciatori degli Appennini ('Apennine Hunters' or light infantry). The wreath and *gladius* was the common insignia of the RSI's armed services.

(2) *Comandante di battaglione*, unidentified '*brigata partigiana*'

This partisan battalion commander marching into a liberated town is wearing British economy-pattern battledress, with the commonly seen Italian Army *'Alpino'* hat of enlisted ranks' pattern. The new badge is the red star of the Garibaldi groups bearing a white circle and green disc; some non-Communist groups sported a variation with a red outer circle instead of the star. He wears a red bandanna at his neck; on his left breast, rank insignia of two gold stars on a gold-edged red patch; and around his left arm, one of the several variations of the CLN brassard then worn by almost all partisans (see Plate D1a, but note that the coloured stripes were sometimes arranged vertically). He retains an Italian 'Sam Browne'-style officer's belt, here with a holstered Luger P08 pistol. The sub-machine gun slung round his neck is a 9mm TZ 45, of which some 6,000 examples were produced in Italy in 1944–45.

(3) *Hauptwachtmeister*, unidentified *Gendarmerie* unit

Three Gendarmerie Kommandos (battalions) were active in Italy: Italien-Nord at Brescia, later at Monza; Italien-Mitte at Bologna, later at Desenzano on Lake Garda; and Gendarmerie Einsatz Kommando Bürger, first active in northern and then central Italy, and from September 1944 also at Desenzano. The branch of service of this warrant officer is indicated by the orange Gendarmerie underlay to his Police shoulder boards in brown and silver cord. He wears another variation of the field jackets commonly made up at German unit level from captured Italian camouflage cloth. He is armed with a 9mm Steyr MP34 sub-machine gun produced in Austria, which was widely used by SS and Police units. Its spare magazines are carried in two leather triple belt-pouch sets, partly supported by a strap looped around his neck. He also has a slung mapcase and binoculars.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Italian civilians arrested during an anti-partisan sweep being loaded onto trucks. Those not judged guilty of resistance activities and condemned to be executed were still detained to provide forced labour, either building fortifications locally or being deported to Germany. (Molinari)

of supply and communication. Conversely, in a way the Germans' belated reaction to the partisan threat seems to have contributed, by its very severity, to their insecurity later on. Not until the Via Rasella attack in Rome on 23 March 1944 were security measures for German units and soldiers enforced; but on 31 March orders were given to fire indiscriminately even on civilians when facing a partisan attack, after which civilians in the area were to be arrested and, in serious cases, houses were to be burned down. Without entering into a discussion here of their legal or moral aspects, indiscriminate German reprisals against Italian civilians, which reached their peak in summer 1944, not only stained the Wehrmacht's reputation but, arguably, were also counter-productive in the longer term. Kesselring's successor as C-in-C Italy, GenObst von Vietinghoff, recognized that savage reprisals had driven Italian civilians right into the partisans' arms – a lesson that has been repeated in many counter-insurgency wars since 1945.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Facts and figures are partly drawn from German and Italian records in the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (Freiburg im Breisgau); Archivio Centrale dello Stato and Archivio Ufficio Storico dell'Esercito (both in Rome); and the Imperial War Museum (Duxford).

Baldissara, Luca, ed, *Atlante storico della Resistenza* (Milan, 2000)
Battaglia, Roberto, *Storia della Resistenza italiana* (Turin, 1954)
Birn, Ruth Bettina, *Die Höheren SS- und Polizeiführer* (Düsseldorf, 1986)
Blood, Philip W., *Hitler's Bandit Hunters – The SS and the Nazi Occupation of Europe* (Dulles, 2006)

The final insurrection declared on 25 April 1945 released the partisans to take control of the main cities, often before Allied troops arrived. The smartly dressed gentleman at the left of this photograph, out in the streets carrying a weapon, is revealing of the mood of those days. The Allies credited the partisans with liberating 125 towns and taking 80,000 German prisoners at the end of the war. (Molinari)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Bocca, Giorgio, *Storia dell'Italia Partigiana, settembre 1943 – maggio 1945* (Bari, 1966)
Collotti, Enzo, Renato Sandri, & Frediano Sessi, eds, *Dizionario della Resistenza* (Turin, 2001)
Dal Pra, Mario, *La guerra partigiana in Italia* (Florence, 2009)
Della Volpe, Nicola, *I militari per la guerra partigiana* (Rome, 2011)
Delzell, Charles F., *Mussolini's Enemies – The Italian Anti-Fascist Resistance* (Princeton, 1961)
Doherty, Richard, *Eighth Army in Italy – The Long Hard Slog* (Barnsley, 2007)
Gentile, Carlo, *Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Partisanenkrieg; Italien 1943–1945* (Paderborn, 2012)
Greiner, Helmuth & Percy Ernst Schramm, eds, *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (Frankfurt am Main, 1961–1965)
Ilari, Virgilio, *Storia del servizio militare in Italia – Vol IV: Soldati e partigiani (1943–1945)* (Rome, 1991)
Istituto Veneto per la Storia della Resistenza, ed, *Tedeschi, Partigiani e popolazioni nell'Alpenvorland 1943–1945* (Venice, 1994)
Jackson, Sir William, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Vol 6* (London, 1984–1988)
Klinkhammer, Lutz, *Zwischen Bündnis und Besatzung. Das nationalsozialistische Italien und die Republik von Salò* (Tübingen, 1993)
Lamb, Richard, *War in Italy, 1943–1945 – A Brutal Story* (London, 1993)
Marston, Daniel & Carter Malkasian, eds, *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare* (Oxford, 2008)
Pietra, Antonio, *Guerriglia e controguerriglia. Un bilancio militare della resistenza 1943–1945* (Novale, 1997)
Piffer, Tommaso, *Gli Alleati e la Resistenza* (Bologna, 2010)
Podda, Vincenzo, *La marcia contro la Vandea* (Milan, 2012)
Poggio, Pier Paolo & Bruna Micheletti, eds, *La guerra partigiana in Italia e in Europa* (Brescia, 2001)
Schreiber, Gerhard, *Deutsche Kriegsverbrechen in Italien* (Munich, 1966)
Stafford, David, *Mission Accomplished – SOE and Italy 1943–1945* (London, 2011)
Tudor, Malcolm, *SOE in Italy 1940–1945* (Woodlands, 2011)
Ventura, Angelo, ed, *La società veneta dalla Resistenza alla Repubblica* (Padova, 1997)
Weckstein, Leon, *200,000 Heroes – Italian Partisans and the American OSS in World War II* (Ashland, 2011)

Carlo Gentile's outstanding research work on partisan warfare in Italy has produced a wealth of essays and research material available on the Internet; see in particular the websites
http://uni-koeln.academia.edu/CarloGentile, and
http://dhi-roma.it/ortdb.html?&L=11

A Fascist captured during the insurrection of late April 1945 is held by a uniformed partisan wearing an *'Alpino'* hat and sporting a coloured scarf. Perhaps the man in civilian clothes has denounced the prisoner? The collaborator will soon be executed out of hand – just another one of those unfortunates who paid the price of the civil war that continued after the German surrender. (Vitetti)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

INDEX

References to images are in **bold**. References to plates are in **bold** with captions in brackets.

Action party 9
airdrops 26, **46**, 47, 52, 55
Alarmeinheiten ('alarm units') 58–59
Alexander, FM Sir Harold 26, 46
Allied forces 4, 8, 23, 24, 29; and supplies 46, 47, 52, 55; *see also* British Army; US Army
Alps, the 22, 23, 29–30
ammunition 52, 55
anti-partisan operations 19–20, 22–24, 28–32, 35–36, 37–38, 42–43, 47–48
Anzio, battle of (1944) 4, 8, 18
Apennines 22–23, 30–32, 35–36, 37–38, 47
Ardeatine cave killings 19
Arditi di Polizia ('Police Special Forces') 40, **49** (48)
armbands **25** (24)
assassinations 18
attacks 18, 19, 23, 56

Badoglio, Gen Pietro 4
Bandenabschnitte ('bandit sectors') 58
BdO (Befehlsheber der Ordnungspolizei) 10, 11
BdS (Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und SD) 10, 11, 15, 58
Black Brigades *see* Brigate Nere
Blackshirts 12, 14, **25** (24)
Bologna 43, 45, 58
Bolzano 11
Borghese, Prince Junio Valerio 34–35
Boves **5**, 8
Brigate Nere ('Black Brigades') 28, 37, 39, **41** (40), 44, 58
British Army: 2nd SAS Rgt **55**; Eighth 32, 42, 47, 50
British Liaison Officers (BLOs) 26, **49** (48), 55
Brunner, SS-Brigaf Karl 11

Cacciatori degli Appennini 27, 28, 35, 38, 42, **45**, **61** (60)
cap badges **25** (24), **49** (48)
Carabinieri military police 14, 15, 27, **33** (32)
Casadei, Umberto 36
Catholics 9, 24
Centro Addestramento Reparti Speciali (CARS) 27, 37, 38
civilians 8, 9, 30, 31, **44**, 54, 62
CLN Alta Italia (CLNAI) 9, 24, 50
clothing **9**, **11**, **14**, **25** (24), **33** (32), **45**; *see also* uniforms
Co-Belligerent Army 26
Comando Contro Guerriglia (CoGu) 34–35, 38
Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale (CLN) 9
communications 53–54, 56; *see also* radio
Communists 9, 18–19
conscription 11
Corbari, Silvio 36
Corpo Volontari della Libertà 24
Cosa, Capt Piero **51**
Czechs 10, **53**

Davies, Capt Jim 26
deserters 24
discipline 55
Dolomites 23, 38
draft-dodgers 9, 51, 55
'*Duce*-Italy' 5, 20

Esercito Nazionale Repubblicano (ENR) 27, 34, 37

Fascists 27, 28, 51
Fiamme Verdi ('Green Flames') brigades 9
field armies 35
Florence 15, 32, 34, 58
'free zones' 26–27, 30, 42, 46, 54, 60
French Resistance 52
Fronte Militare di Liberazione 58

Garibaldi brigades 9, 24, 29, 32, 35, **41** (40), 43, 51; 36th 47; Brigata Volante Severino **36**
Geheime Feldpolizei ('Secret Field Police') 57–58
Gendarmarie (Gend Eins Kdo Bürger) 15, 24, 31, 32, **61** (60)
Genoa 50, 58
German Army 15, 38–39, 50; 16. SS-Pz Gren Div 36; 34 ID 37; 90 Pz Gren Div 30, 34; 148 ID 30; 157 ID 30, 36; AOK 10; 4, **13** (12), 19; AOK 14; 4–5, 19, 43, 45; AOK Ligurien 30, 31, 34; Armee Abteilung von Zangen 31; Armeegruppe von Zangen 22, 23; II Btl/3 Brandenburg Rgt **18**, **21** (20), 36; Korps Lombardia 30, 38, 43; Korps Witthöft 22; LI Geb AK 16, 18
German police troops 38; 'Alpenvorland' 39, 43; 'Bozen' **33** (32), 39, 43; 'Brixen' 39; SSPF (SS- und Polizei Führer) 19, 20, 28–29, 31, 38
Germany: and intelligence 57–58; and tactics 59–60; and territorial control 58–59
Giustizia e Libertà (GL) brigades 9, 24, 35
Globocnik, SS-Ogruf Odilo 11
Gothic Line defences 28–29, 35, 42
Graziani, FM Rodolfo 28
Great Britain 26, 35; *see also* British Army
'Green Week' 43–44
Gruppi di Azione Patriottica (PAG) 9
Guardia Giovanile Legionaria (GGR) 14
Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana (GNR) 14, 22, **25** (24), 26, 27, 29, **40**; and police 58
guerrilla warfare 8, 9, 52, 54
Gustav (Bernhard) Line 4

hangings **35**
Häsecker, Karl **30**
Himmler, Heinrich 10, 11–12, 20
Hitler, Adolf 4, 5, 35
hostages 30

Ispettorato Speciale Polizia Antipartigiana 58
Italian Africa Police (PAI) 14, 15, **21** (20)
Italian Army 4, **5**, 8, 12, 15, 52; *see also* Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana
Italian police 14–15

Jagdkommandos ('hunting commandos') 59
Johnston, Maj Vivian 26

Kappler, Herbert **10**, 19
Kesselring, GFM Albert 4, 5–6, 14, 27, 30; and anti-partisan operations 19, 20; and 'Green Week' 43–44

Landwacht ('Territorial Guard') 39
Lanza di Montezemolo, Col Giuseppe 58
leadership 50–51, 55
Legione Autonoma Mobile 'Ettore Muti' 15, 40
Liguria 34–35, 36–37
looting 18, 19, 56
losses 56–57
Luftwaffe 10, **19**, 22; 'Herman Göring' division 22–23, **25** (24), **57**; Sich Rgt Italien 29, **41** (40)

MacDonald, Maj Alastair 48
Mackensen, Gen Eberhard von 4
Martini, Maj Enrico 'Mauri' 54
Matteotti brigades 9, 35
Mazzini brigades 9
Milan 15, **30**, **47**, 50, 58
Militärkommandanturen (MKs) 10, 18
Moscatelli, Vincenzo 'Cino' 29
mountain regions 8, 50
Mussolini, Benito 4, 5, 6, 27–28, 50

Naples 4, 8

Office of Strategic Services (OSS) 26
OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht) 20
Operation 'Olive' (1944) 35
Operation 'Piave' (1944) 42–43, **60**
OZAK (Operationzone Adriatisches Küstenland) 5, 39
OZAV (Operationszone Alpenvorland) 5, 11, 38–39

PAG *see* Gruppi di Azione Patriottica
PAI *see* Italian Africa Police
partisan warfare 16, 18–19; map, spring 1944 map **13** (12); map, summer–autumn 1944 **17** (16)
partisans 8–9, 26, 60, 62; and communications 53–54; and equipment 52; and morale 46–47; and organisation 9, 24, 47, 50–52; and tactics 54–56
Patriotic Action Group 19
Pavolini, Alessandro 35
Peniakoff, Maj Vladimir 47
Polizia Repubblicana 15, 58
prisoners of war (POWs) 8, 16, 31, **60**

radio 26, 53, **54**
railways 56
Rauff, SS-Ostubaf Walter 11
recruitment 11–12
Reparti Anti Partigiani (RAP) 42
Repubblica Sociale Italiana (RSI) 6, 26, **38**, 46, 51; and collapse 27–28; and reorganization 39–40, 42
Republicans 9
resisters 8
Ricci, Renato 14, **40**
roadblocks **18**, **19**
Rome 8, 14–15, 58; Via Rasella attack 19, **20**, 62
Rommel, GFM Erwin 4, 11
RSI *see* Repubblica Sociale Italiana

sabotage 18, 19, 23, 56
'sanctuaries' 53–54
Slovakian Technical Bde 10
Slovenia 38
Socialists 9
SOD (Südtiroler Ordnungs Dienst) 11, 38–39
Soviet Union 10
Spanish Civil War 52
Special Operations Executive (SOE) 26, 58
Squadre di Azione Patriottica (SAP) 24
SS and Police 6, 10–12; map **13** (12)
Standschützen ('Static Defence') 39
Sturmbrigade Pinerolo 29
Switzerland 34, 44

Tensfeld, SS-Brigaf Willy 11, 34, **40**
Tilman, Maj Harold 55
Tito, Josip 38
Toussaint, Gen Rudolf 5, 6, 10, 19, 28
TSV (Trientiner Sicherungs Verband) 11, **49** (48)
Turin 35, 50, 58

uniforms, German **10**, **21** (20), **41** (40), **49** (48); police **33** (32), **61** (60)
uniforms, Italian **25** (24), **30**, **31**, **34**, **41** (40); police **33** (32)
uniforms, partisan **21** (20), **27**, **61** (60)
US Army: 88th Inf Div 47; Fifth 42, 47, 50

Venice 50
Vietinghoff, Gen Heinrich von 4, 50, 62
Vincent, Maj Hedley 26
Volkssturm national militia 39
volunteers: German 11–12; Italian 14; partisan 24
von Kamptz, SS-Gruf Jürgen 10, 11, 28, 29, 38

Wach Kompanie 10
Waffen-SS 29, **31**
weaponry, German: MG15 machine gun **25** (24); MP40 sub-machine gun **21** (20), **41** (40), **61** (60); pistol **25** (24)
weaponry, Italian: Carcano carbine **37**
weaponry, partisan **27**, **34**, 52; Beretta pistol **41** (40), **47**; Breda 30 light machine gun **8**, **14**; Carcano carbine **9**, **25** (24), **61** (60); Kar 98 rifles **9**; Marlin sub-machine gun **36**; MG42 machine gun **46**; Sten sub-machine gun **9**, **33** (32), **42**; TZ 45 sub-machine gun **47**, **61** (60)
'White Week' 45–46
Wiessner, SS-HStuf Adolf 58
With, SS-Oberf Harro 58
Wolff, SS-Ogruf Karl 6, 10, 14, 19, 20, 28, 34, 38; and Brigate Nere 39; and field armies 35; and intelligence 58

Yugoslavia 8, 12, 27

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

First published in Great Britain in 2015 by Osprey Publishing
PO Box 883, Oxford, OX1 9PL, UK
PO Box 3985, New York, NY 10185–3985, USA
E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com

Osprey Publishing, part of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
© 2015 Osprey Publishing Ltd.

All rights reserved. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrical, chemical, mechanical, optical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner. Enquiries should be addressed to the Publishers.

© Osprey Publishing. Access to this book is not digitally restricted. In return, we ask you that you use it for personal, non--commercial purposes only. Please don't upload this ebook to a peer--to--peer site, email it to everyone you know, or resell it. Osprey Publishing reserves all rights to its digital content and no part of these products may be copied, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise (except as permitted here), without the written permission of the publisher. Please support our continuing book publishing programme by using this e--book responsibly.

Every effort has been made by the Publisher to secure permissions to use the images in this publication. If there has been any oversight we would be happy to rectify the situation and written submission should be made to Osprey Publishing.A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Print ISBN: 978 1 4728 0893 6
PDF ebook ISBN: 978 1 4728 0894 3
ePub ebook ISBN: 978 1 4728 0895 0

Editor: Martin Windrow
Maps by JB Illustrations
Index by Zoe Ross
Typeset in Sabon and Myraid Pro
Originated by PDQ Media, Bungay, UK

Osprey Publishing supports the Woodland Trust, the UK's leading woodland conservation charity. Between 2014 and 2018 our donations are being spent on their Centenary Woods project in the UK.

www.ospreypublishing.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to thank Andrea Molinari (Milan); Count Ernesto G. Vitetti (Rome); the Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia, in particular the Rome section; and the Ufficio Storico dell'Esercito (Rome) for their help and support.
Photo credits are abbreviated as follows: ANPI = Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia; Cappellano = Filippo Cappellano Collection; Crociani = Piero Crociani Collection; Molinari = Andrea Molinari Collection; Vitetti = Count Ernesto G. Vitetti Collection.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Italian units: in the Italian language male nouns (generally ending in 'o' or 'e') usually take a final 'i' in the plural (e.g. sing. *divisione*, pl. *divisioni*); female nouns (ending in 'a') take a final 'e' (e.g. sing. *compagnia*, pl. *compagnie*). Collective titles such as *Arditi* are plural (sing. *Ardito*). However, in this text nearly all Italian unit titles are anglicized for clarity.
Some place names in the text have been anglicized (e.g. Florence, Genoa, Padua). Some valley names are anglicized– e.g. Sesia Valley – but most have the common elided form, e.g. Val Sesia or Valsesia.
German unit abbreviations: Roman numerals identify the battalion and Arabic numerals the regiment; e.g., I/SS-Pol Rgt 20 = 1st Battalion, SS-Police Regiment 20. Other forms of abbreviation, e.g. for command entities, will be found in the Glossary on page 6 & 7.

References in square brackets in the text, e.g. [A-20], relate to Maps A and B on pages 13 and 17; the reference number is shown ringed on the map at the approximate location of the anti-partisan operation mentioned. Partisan 'free zones' are indicated in the text and map by e.g. [B, area C].

ARTIST'S NOTE

Readers may care to note that the original paintings from which the colour plates in this book were prepared are available for private sale. All reproduction copyright whatsoever is retained by the Publishers. All enquiries should be addressed to:

Peter Dennis, Fieldhead, The Park, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire NG18 2AG, UK

The Publishers regret that they can enter into no correspondence upon this matter

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com